VOR™

THE MAELSTROM

FASA CORPORATION

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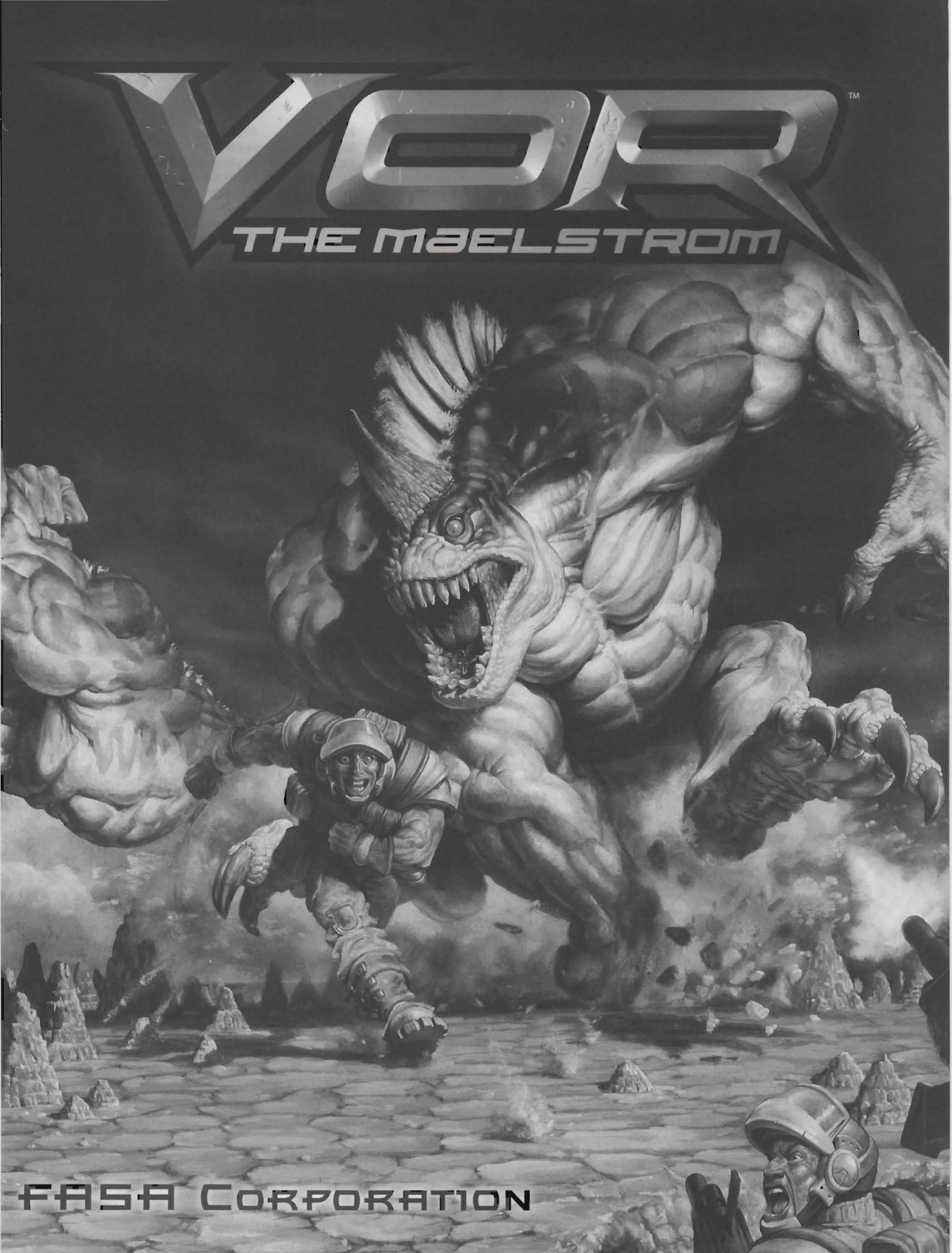

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INTRODUCTION

VOR: The Maelstrom is a fast-paced science fiction miniatures game of tactical combat.

The Maelstrom is a cosmic vortex of vast proportions, a pocket universe where the laws of physics are warped and twisted into an obscene parody of reality. At its center is the Maw, a voracious singularity of chaotic energies that exists only to consume and destroy.

The Maelstrom consumes worlds, perverting them into nightmarish landscapes. Once-fertile plains are violated by alien mountain ranges. Twisted forests are fused with modern metroplexes. The unfortunate survivors of these doomed worlds must struggle to live in a deadly environment. Their lives are transformed into an endless fight for resources, an endless quest for stability and escape. Their greatest goal is to stay alive.

The Maelstrom offers only two choices: victory—or death.

VOR: The Maelstrom is a tabletop war game for two or more players. The forces the players use in their battles represent the survivors of worlds that have been drawn into the Maelstrom. Players build their forces by collecting and painting miniatures.

The VOR rulebook begins with a description of the game and an overview of the Maelstrom and the current status of the Earth. Examples of creatures and terrain that may be found within the Maelstrom are described in *Creatures and Locations*. Force profiles detail the various races and factions within the Melstrom, including a physical description, brief history, overview of territory controlled and explanation of fighting style for each force. The book then moves on to the game rules themselves, beginning with *Game Concepts*, which provides the basic terms and concepts used in *VOR*. *Playing the Game* gets you started, and *Movement* and *Combat* describe how the miniatures move and fight. The rulebook also includes advanced rules for *Vehicles, Scenarios, Campaigns* and *Custom Force Creation*. Finally, the *Force Lists* provide detailed descriptions of the four factions in the box, including the weapons and powers that each force wields.

COMPONENTS

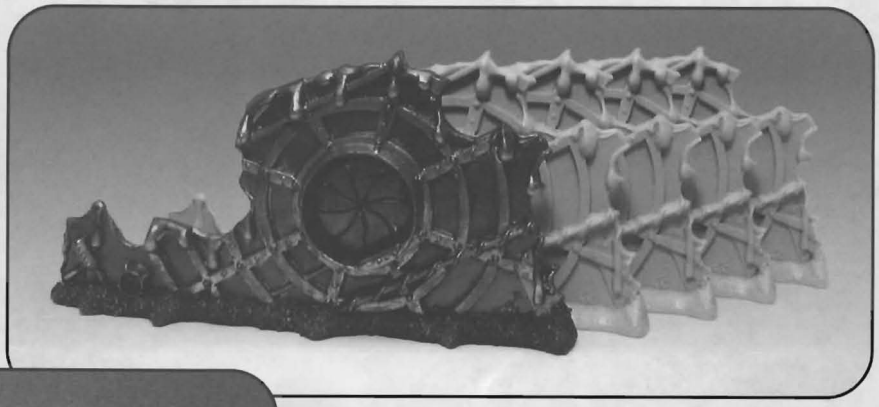
The *VOR: The Maelstrom* boxed set contains everything you need to begin playing *VOR*. Before starting play, check to make sure the box contains the following components:

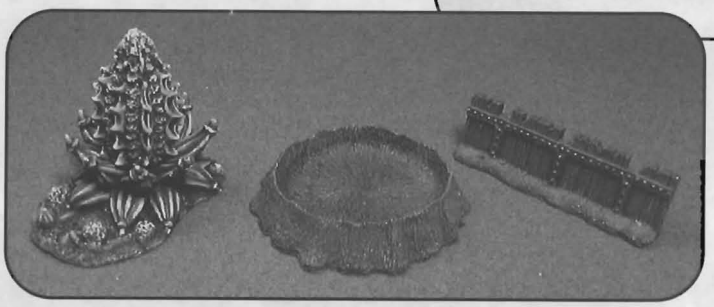
1 rulebook (this book)
1 book of scenarios
9 Union miniatures
7 growler miniatures (1 bull, 3 onehorns and 3 pups)
3 plastic area-effect templates
5 terrain walls
2 ten-sided dice

BATTLEFIELD TERRAIN

Terrain is important for war gaming because it creates cover and blind spots that players can use to develop a strategy for a game. The walls included in this game are a good example of useful terrain. Terrain also makes the game more fun to watch.

Several companies make quality terrain specifically for war gaming. You can also make your own terrain, or simply use common household objects to create a varied landscape. The more terrain you use, the more interesting your games will be.





DICE

This game requires you to use a 10-sided die (abbreviated as D10) to resolve a wide variety of game effects. Most 10-sided dice show a zero on one face. The zero represents a value of ten.

If D10 appears with a modifier (for example, D10 + 1 or D10 – 2), roll the die, then apply the modifier to the die roll to get the result. For example, if told to roll D10 + 2, and you roll a 4, the final result is 6 (4 + 2).

If the rules call for a D100 roll, roll D10 twice, using the first result as the tens value and the second result as the ones value, reading the zero on the die as zero, not ten. For example, a 2 on the first roll and a 3 on the second roll would be 23. A 0 on the first roll and a 7 on the second would be 7. If both dice show zeroes, the result is 100.

A RULER

The standard unit of measure in *VOR* is the inch. The range of weapons and the distance you can move your models are both measured using a standard ruler or measuring tape. Flexible fabric measuring tapes are ideal for use with tabletop war games, but a ruler or metal tape measure will also work.

WHAT IS TABLETOP WAR GAMING?

A unique fusion of three distinct elements, tabletop war gaming combines the thrill of tactical conflict, the pleasure of collecting and painting miniatures, and competitive fun!

TACTICAL CONFLICT

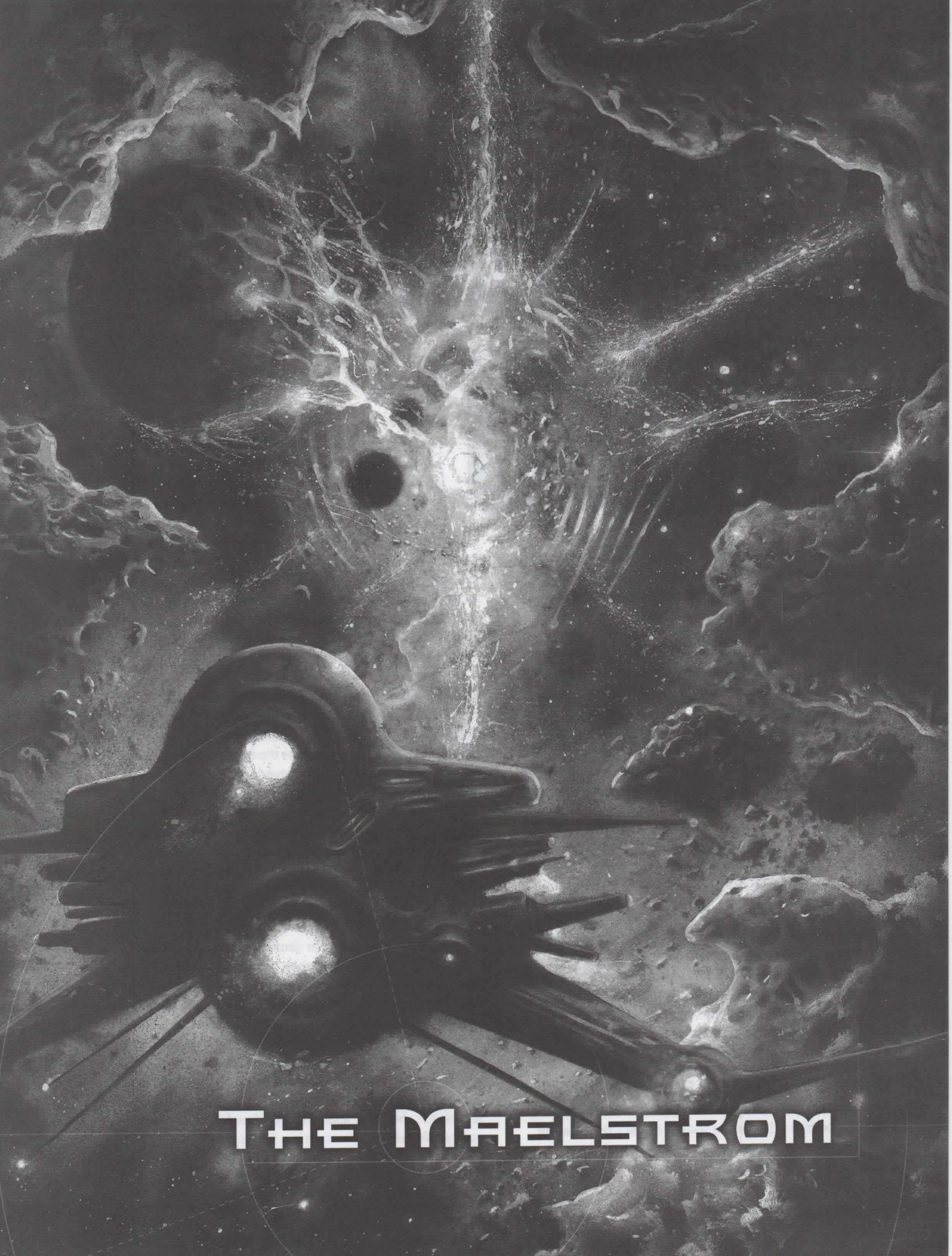
In general, tabletop war games offer an entertaining way for players to simulate conflicts between forces of varying sizes using miniature replicas of the warriors involved. Players maneuver their miniatures around the battlefield (usually a large, flat surface such as a table or the floor), making use of whatever cover the battlefield's terrain may provide (model trees, ruined buildings and so on) and rolling dice to determine if their models' attacks succeed in defeating their opponent's models. After an agreed-upon number of turns, the players determine a winner based on how well their forces performed.

COLLECTING AND PAINTING MINIATURES

Most players find collecting and painting the miniatures that they use in the game to be as much fun as actually playing. Because each player chooses the miniatures that will make up their force, they often give certain models in their force special names and backgrounds, even customizing the miniatures to make them unique—and the more unique the force, the more enjoyable and rewarding the game becomes. When set up using nicely painted figures and good quality terrain, tabletop war games can be as enjoyable to watch as they are to play.

COMPETITIVE FUN!

It's very easy to get a war gamer to tell you which race they think is the coolest in a given game; everyone has their favorite. Identifying closely with a particular race or force is a natural part of war gaming, with every player trying to prove that their particular force is top dog in the kennel. There's nothing quite like bragging all week that you're gonna stomp your opponent, then doing just that! Taunts and ominous-sounding threats delivered and accepted in a friendly fashion generate great competitive energy. Of course, it's only a game, and players should be able to lose as cheerfully as they win—you can always even the score in a future game!


THE MAELSTROM

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Long, alien fingers grasp the carefully formed arm of the chair. The being breathes deeply, his ancient lungs working hard to take in air. He settles back, sighs, and closes his eyes.

How many more sessions? How long until the search is complete? How many more failures must he endure? The search has gone on for centuries. The task seems endless.

Sighing again, he settles back, closes his eyes and casts his mind out—into the Maelstrom around him.

The Maelstrom.

Its origin … unimaginable. Its hunger … insatiable. Its power … immeasurable.

The Maelstrom is a cosmic vortex of vast proportions, a pocket universe where the laws of physics are warped and twisted into an obscene parody of reality. It is a voracious singularity that exists only to devour and destroy.

The Maelstrom consumes worlds. Within a swirling storm of chaos, planets are ripped asunder or fused into strange, alien landscapes. The survivors of these doomed worlds must struggle to live in a savage, unstable environment. Their lives are transformed into an endless fight for resources, an endless quest for stability and escape.

They are condemned.

The Maelstrom seizes worlds from our universe and draws them into itself, where they are eventually absorbed or destroyed. For the denizens of these forsaken worlds, it is a terrifying experience. Black tendrils of dark matter splash across the sky, dripping down until an unnatural night covers the world. Powerful storms sweep over the planet's surface, wreaking havoc. The cold, inky tentacles of the Maelstrom grasp the world and draw it inexorably to its fate. The sky falls. Shards of black energy race down from above, smashing deep into the flesh of the planet. The ground shakes and buckles as forces beyond comprehension reach into the very heart of the world and shake it loose from its place in reality, wrenching it free. In mere moments, the planet leaves the known universe and enters Hell. It is the ultimate violation.

His mind takes flight, reaching outward, ever outward, to the edge of this warped reality, to the Veil.

The writhing, formless wall of the Veil stretches out in all directions. It is vast, impenetrable, unknowable. Its boundaries cannot be determined. Its composition is unknown. The tormented souls that lie within its confines can only guess at its nature, its purpose.

Rolling clouds of gray-black something *twist in and out of his vision. The Veil is hypnotic, constantly moving and changing. He casts his mind further and sees nothing. The Veil is too vast, too expansive, surrounding the entire Maelstrom itself. It is the outer limit, a distorted wall, sometimes growing outward and other times shrinking inward. He cannot pierce its ominous emptiness, but he knows what he seeks does not lie this far from the Maw. He must look elsewhere, closer to the center.*

He is turning away, pushing his mind inward, when he senses a disturbance. A portion of the immense, smoky wall begins to push outward. The Veil parts! An enormous planet, a gas giant, bursts out of the nothingness and is reborn into this nightmare reality. For a moment he panics, fearing he will be obliterated by this gaseous titan. Then, regaining his composure, he remembers where he is, who he is, and returns to his task. He watches and observes.

THE VEIL

Once the Maelstrom has grasped a world in its clutches, it sucks it from our reality through the Veil. The Veil is a dark, shifting field that surrounds the Maelstrom, sealing the unfortunate denizens of stolen worlds within its impermeable perimeter. Roughly spherical, the actual dimensions of the Veil are difficult, if not impossible to calculate; as a surface it is uneven and rapidly changing, like turbulent seas. The Veil is as mysterious as the Maelstrom itself. From within, it appears as a smoky wall, constantly in motion. If there is an outside to be seen, no one has claimed to have viewed it. Planets emerge from the Veil's oily darkness, but nothing can return through it to the sanity of the known universe, though many have died trying.

With rare exceptions, life cannot survive for long within the Veil's gray depths. The occupants of captured worlds somehow make the transition to the Maelstrom, but it is a terrifying, shattering experience. Many do not survive the ordeal. Those who do must carry on against unimaginable odds.

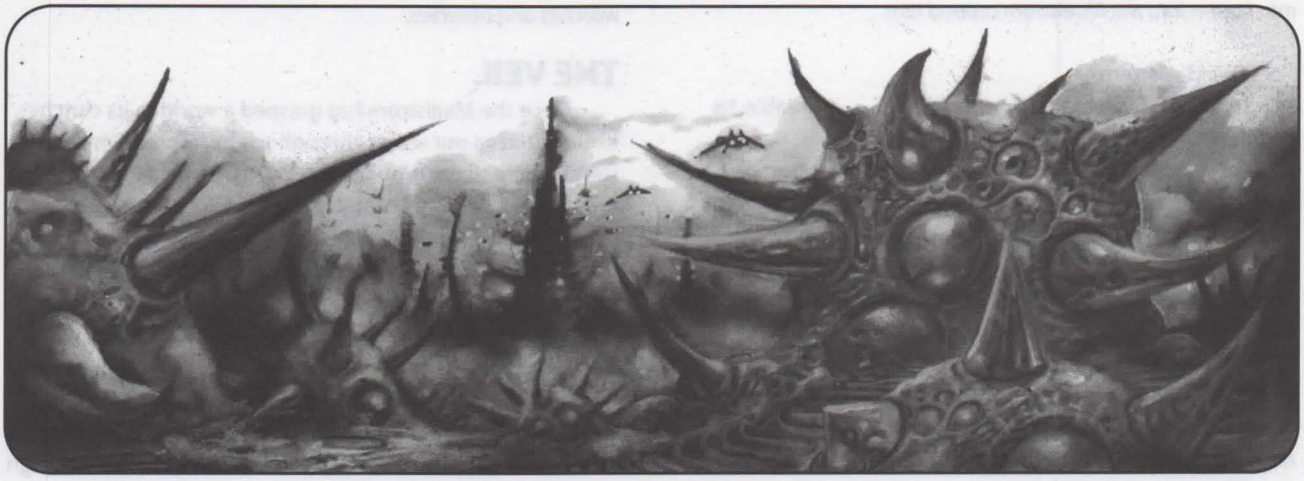
The trip through the Veil is devastating for the planets as well as the life-forms that dwell on them. The Maelstrom rarely ensnares one planet at a time and the reality-shifting process that rips them across the Veil often has terrible side effects. Planets are sometimes fused together as they materialize in the Veil, yielding strange and violent new worlds covered in malformed, unnatural landscapes. This fusion can result in the complete destruction of one world and the total topographic reconstruction of another, or it can yield patchwork worlds, nightmarish mixtures of landscape and life-form, abominations of nature.

One thing is certain: nothing that travels through the Veil emerges unchanged.

Gray-black matter falls away in swirling trails as the gas giant descends into the Maelstrom, away from the Veil. He wonders, briefly, where it came from and what drastic changes have been wrought upon it. Is it doomed? Will it plunge quickly through the Maelstrom toward the Maw and destruction? Or will it find a place in the Outer Ring and drift inexorably inward, moving slowly and surely toward inevitable doom? Do intelligent beings dwell within its stormy, blue-green atmosphere?

Curious, forgetting his task, he reaches forward with his mind and plunges his consciousness deep into the gas giant's stratosphere.

Life! The planet is inhabited. Huge, airborne creatures with translucent wings and smooth, aerodynamic bodies climb and dive amongst the clouds. Colors pulsate up and down the length of their bodies. The entire spectrum is displayed in a sequence of rapid light pulses. Communication, he thinks—these beings are intelligent.



Disoriented by their trip through the Veil, the creatures fly about in panic, frantically flashing a blinding array of colors at one another. He is enthralled by their graceful forms, the beauty of their flight. Even in their fear-stricken state these creatures are a joy to behold.

A wave of sadness washes over him. These extraordinary beings are unaware of the doom that awaits them.

He senses a sudden change in the light, and the gas currents around him drive with greater intensity. The airborne creatures flap wildly, swoop and dive downward, driven by an urgent need to escape. Startled out of his reverie, he realizes what is happening and casts his mind up and away, back to the void.

The planet is moving inward at a startling pace. A tentacle of horrible energy has lashed out from the Maw, pulling the gas giant toward the Central Ring. He watches with sick fascination, unable to turn away, as asteroids and space debris impact upon the rapidly moving sphere, generating explosions that would rip a smaller world apart. The creatures are dying. The planet is doomed. Within minutes, he sees the end. The planet dives through the Central Ring and smashes into the dense Inner Ring of the Maelstrom. Hundreds of orbiting objects, the remnants of earlier collisions, batter the gas giant, igniting its atmosphere. The planet explodes in a blinding flash, spewing radiation and chunks of debris in all directions. The shock wave swells outward, then is swept away into the swirling chaos of the Maelstrom.

The imagined death cries of hundreds of thousands of the beautiful airborne creatures echo in his head.

Mere seconds have passed, it is over. The giant and its inhabitants are gone. Horrified by what he has just witnessed, frustrated at his inability to affect it, he turns away. The search must continue.

The shape and nature of the Maelstrom are in constant flux, but there is a general structure to the chaos. Nearly all of the objects in the Maelstrom orbit in concentric planes around a central point, known as the Maw. Unlike a solar system, in which most objects occupy a single, broad plane, objects in the Maelstrom whip and whirl around the Maw on a variety of planes and at a variety of speeds, in an ever-decaying orbit that will eventually lead to their destruction. These multiple planes are dense enough to be grouped together as three distinct spherical layers. If you were to cut a two-dimensional cross section of this formation, you would see three distinct rings circling the Maw: the Outer Ring, the Central Ring and the Inner Ring.

Each ring has its own unique characteristics and unusual phenomena. Within them, orbiting objects are constantly smashing into one another or altering course, spinning and whirling in an awesome dance of doom. Each ring presents new challenges to those who would survive amid the chaos and disorder of the Maelstrom.

THE OUTER RING

Planets that survive the shift from our universe into the Maelstrom emerge into its Outer Ring. From this point, they are drawn ever inward, in a decaying spiral orbit, toward the destructive core and inevitable annihilation.

Compared to the instability and unpredictable nature of the rest of the Maelstrom, the Outer Ring is a bastion of normalcy. Perhaps the safest section of the Maelstrom, it is far from comfortable. From the moment a world is pulled in, it risks destruction. Electromagnetic storms rage through the vortex, sometimes ravaging recently transported worlds. Tendrils of indescribable force may leap out from the Maw and

drag objects, even whole planets, toward instant obliteration. There are sections of the Outer Ring where gravity itself behaves erratically, causing objects to smash together or grow so dense they begin to collapse on themselves. These gravitic anomalies cannot be tracked or predicted, and they are among the most destructive forces in the Maelstrom.

Objects in the Outer Ring collide and explode with startling frequency, often leaving nothing behind but shattered remains and floating debris. Asteroids and comets whirl through the vortex at unbelievable speeds, all capable of striking an unfortunate world as it travels through the Outer Ring. Potential doom is everywhere.

The Outer Ring is riddled with unexplained phenomena, and as planets rotate in orbit around the core of the Maelstrom, they eventually encounter some of these incongruities. For example, there is a section of the Outer Ring known to some inhabitants of the Maelstrom as *the Darkness*, which cannot be penetrated by any probe or signal. As planets enter this region, they literally seem to disappear from local space/time. Eventually, they reappear, but nothing that passes through the Darkness emerges unchanged. Objects may be turned inside out, shattered, or warped into fiendish parodies of their former shapes. While the Maelstrom itself experiences occasional temporal inconsistencies, time in the Darkness seems completely erratic; planets may emerge from this region having experienced a thousand years of evolution in weeks or ten seconds of time in a year.

The Outer Ring is also home to one of the strangest objects in the Maelstrom: a gigantic, metallic object known simply as *the Spinner*. This extraordinary device measures several miles across, with thousands of mile-long spikes projecting outward from its surface in all directions. As its name implies, the Spinner rotates on its axis at tremendous speeds, roaming the Outer Ring on an erratic course. Unlike most objects in the Maelstrom, the Spinner does not appear to be caught in a steadily decaying orbit around the Maw. Rather, it bounces back and forth between the inner edge of the Outer Ring and the Veil. Its nature and purpose are a mystery.

Pushing his mind across the void, he searches, probing the stygian depths of dead, dark worlds and seeking among the luminous glow of miniature nebulae. The quest continues. What was lost must be found, or Vor will consume all. They betrayed life, betrayed all that exists in their mad quest to … wait. There. He perceives a presence, an energy source, on the gray planetoid below. With the speed of a single thought, he is there, his mind probing and digging, not daring to hope. The energy source is powerful and ancient. His consciousness glides over the barren surface, carefully focused on the search, barely noticing the desolate wasteland below. He pauses momentarily, observing that water once flowed here, that life once clung to the dead surface of this place, then he moves on. His mind skims over dusty foothills and dry sea beds until, at last, he sees the ruins.

Crumbling buildings, once a shining tribute to the advancement of an enlightened race, lie in shambles. The metallic remains of an ancient outpost (an observatory?) are scattered through the wreckage. He feels energy radiating from this site, senses the unceasing efforts of eons-old technology. What he seeks may lie below.

As he draws near the source, he … COME … *feels a presence, the power that is emanating from beneath the surface …* NOW … *of this world. He feels …* HUNGRY … *excitement. After ages of searching, will he be the one to …* NOWNEWFLESHMIND …

Startled, he encounters the source. Its black sentience lurches out at him, grabbing at him, clutching him to itself. Impossible! He is pure, projected consciousness. Undetectable. Intangible.

… NOWHUNGRYMINDFLESHGROWNEWLIFEMINE …

Its thoughts mingle with his own: Alien. Deadly. Pure. Evil. Mine. Now. Kill. Flesh. Mind. Hungry. New. Before he can even think to react, to pull back, it has him. Its blackness engulfs him. It is impossibly ancient, old beyond comprehension, mighty beyond belief. It is cold, alien, horrible, profane … GROWMINDEATNOWMINE … *he feels his mind slipping, his consciousness diluted and weakening. This is not the goal, not the object he sought! He exerts himself, panicking, struggling and …*

Disconnects. His long, golden fingers, wrinkled and spotted with age, clench and unclench weakly. His eyes open momentarily, and then close as he sinks back, exhausted, into unconsciousness.

DENIZENS OF THE MAELSTROM

Despite the twisted conditions present in the Maelstrom, life prevails. Beings of every shape and size, some intelligent, others driven only by instinct, dwell within the confines of the Veil, imprisoned in a universe that refuses to make sense. In many cases, worlds brought into the Maelstrom maintain their previous environments thanks to some unexplainable effect. Others aren't as lucky, and taken from their native stars they begin to suffer massive environmental changes, often freezing into barrenness, or melting under the Maw's hot gaze.

To transplanted life-forms, changes wrought by the Maelstrom defy the laws of physics and stretch their perception of reality to the breaking point. Most of these life-forms seek the relative safety of the Outer Ring, where newly arrived worlds and proximity to the Veil provide the hope of escape or the pleasure of conquest. Other life-forms move inward, adapting to the denser, more dangerous environment of the Central Ring.

Some creatures actually thrive in the Maelstrom, consuming the endless energies generated by its destructive nature or subsisting on the life energies of the unfortunate souls that are drawn in through the Veil. Still others are capable of living on almost anything they can find. Regardless of diet or habit, every living thing in the Maelstrom seeks the same goals: stability, survival and escape.

While the Maelstrom contains life, it is also a graveyard. Planets that once teemed with life float barren through the vortex, rendered uninhabitable by the Maelstrom itself or by savage wars that doom one race while prolonging the life of another. In this hostile environment, only the most adaptable beings find a way to exist. They establish outposts on the most habitable, resource-rich worlds available or in pockets of stability within the chaos of colliding forces that is the Outer Ring. Such holds may remain stable for centuries or may suddenly be sucked into the Maw in a matter of minutes. By necessity, many races are nomadic—it's only a matter of time before any shelter is plundered or destroyed. War and pain are constants.

The primary function of any life-form is survival, and this biological imperative ensures that life in the Maelstrom is a perpetual battle. For many denizens of the Maelstrom, the end always justifies the means. For some, even genocide is an acceptable measure if it guarantees their survival.

Worlds that have recently emerged from the Veil are usually rich in natural resources, and desperate creatures quickly descend upon these recent arrivals, eager to satisfy their hunger for food, water, metals and other materials. Such worlds are prizes to be fought over and the wars that ensue are merciless affairs. The effect on the planet itself is often devastating. Worlds that once abundant with life can be virtually destroyed, their resources drained and their surface transformed by alien ecologies and warfare. Their inhabitants may be slaughtered, enslaved or worse.

The populations of newly arrived worlds, disoriented from their trip through the Veil, often struggle to adjust to the situation they find themselves in. Many have just begun the process of healing, regrouping, and exploring their new setting when the first residents of the Maelstrom arrive. In most cases, they are unprepared for the onslaught of alien beings that descends upon them in an attempt to salvage anything that might ease the burden of life in the vortex.

If native life-forms have the technology and resourcefulness to adapt to their situation and defend their world, they may escape immediate destruction and establish themselves in the Outer Ring, where they are rewarded with the slow circling toward doom in the Maw. Many species have survived attacks on their homeworlds, and even the death of their planets, and carried on to survive, or even thrive, in the Maelstrom. Others have been far less fortunate.

He awakens as the Monitor enters the room. White light reflects off machinery.

"You failed."

"Yes. I did not find the object we seek." His head feels fuzzy, still shaken from his encounter with the ancient, malevolent entity on the gray planetoid. Its evil presence has touched his mind; the memory of it still clings to him. How did the creature detect him, influence him? It is beyond comprehension.

"I … I encountered … "

"It doesn't matter. You are unharmed. Your session ended prematurely. You must continue. The search must continue. That which we lost must be found. It is the only way, the only thing that matters."

He lifts an elegant hand, folding two of his fingers in a gesture of acknowledgement. Standing, he stretches his antiquated limbs and glances at the huge viewscreen across the room. Outside, far away, the Maw hungrily consumes matter. It is voracious, he thinks. It will never be sated, never finished.

"I return to my task," he says. Sitting down in his chair, he casts his mind back into the void.

Races that withstand the early trials of life in the Maelstrom quickly realize that they must spread out if they are to survive and proliferate. The Maelstrom is too hazardous, its dangers too numerous, to stay in one place. At any moment, danger may strike.

As planets are drawn inward to the core of the Maelstrom, the beings occupying those worlds strive to move outward in order to remain in the relative safety of the Outer Ring. Many seek to establish outposts and colonies, footholds that will enable them to survive the rigors of existence in such a hostile place.

Some races manage to create small settlements, pockets of safety amidst the roar of the vortex. Others are more successful, establishing strongholds in stable sections of the Outer Ring and waging war against any who dare trespass into their territory. The most aggressive survive through conquest. They attack, enslave and battle their way through the Maelstrom, seizing territory and technology as they go. Such beings rank among the most successful and dangerous denizens of the Maelstrom.

Inevitably, some creatures are unable, or unwilling, to remain in the Outer Ring. These beings must engage in an even more desperate struggle for survival in the Maelstrom's Central Ring.

His consciousness drifts through the vortex, meticulously searching for a sign, a clue, an end to the search. He has been here before. He will be here again. After countless searches, countless failures, despair has begun to set in. Does that which they seek truly exist? Or is it a story, a legend that has taken on form and the appearance of reality over the eons? Is the search futile?

He banishes the negative thoughts, refusing to succumb to their temptation. Giving up is simple, easy. They can ill afford such a luxury. Too much is at stake. Everything *is at stake.*

He turns his mind away from the deadly dance of the objects in the Outer Ring, casting his thoughts inward, toward the dense Central Ring.

Almost immediately, he is distracted. He senses another power source. It is strong, but too faint to be what he seeks. Curious, feeling the need for a momentary distraction, he pushes toward the energy he senses. There. A planetary fragment. A battle is underway.

Savage creatures rip through armor and bone, only to be shredded mere seconds later by alien weaponry. Growlers. Pharons. It is the pharons he senses. He should have recognized their tainted signature.

The battle rages before him, the participants unaware of his mental presence. Despite the pharons' potent technology, the growlers appear to have the advantage. The pack is large and savage, and the pharons look surprised. They haven't adjusted to the savagery of the growlers' attack and are being overwhelmed by sheer ferocity. Their undying bones crack and break as the growlers wade into them, smashing, biting and ripping. With terrifying aggression, the beasts tear into their foes, undaunted by the technology used against them. Led by their chieftain, a hulking brute with a blood-red mane, the growlers press forward, making short work of the pharon foot soldiers.

Eventually, the pharons' weaponry begins to shift the tide of battle in their favor. Beams of terrible force burn holes through the massive beasts. The growler chieftain is slain, killing two pharons as he falls. It seems the pharons will win despite the heavy casualties the growlers have inflicted.

Suddenly, without warning, a gargantuan shadow falls across the battlefield. The combatants look up in shock. A rogue asteroid, nearly one-quarter the size of the planetary fragment, strikes the battlefield, obliterating both growlers and pharons. The resulting explosion is intense, projecting shock waves and rubble outward into the surrounding space. Smaller objects are thrown off course, crashing into each other and setting off a chain reaction, a ripple effect of collisions and destruction.

The effect is disorienting. His reeling mind takes a moment to recover. Regaining control of his thoughts, he sees that the fragment and the combatants have been completely destroyed, wiped from existence by a random act.

Such is life in the Maelstrom.

Once again, he pushes his mind forward, continuing the search.

THE CENTRAL RING

The Central Ring of the Maelstrom is much more crowded and lethal than the Outer Ring. Planets, asteroids, cosmic debris and the shattered remains of alien cities all drift ever closer to each other as they spiral toward the Maw. Asteroid impacts are more common than in the Outer Ring. Confrontations with aggressive aliens are more common. *Death* is more common.

As in the Outer Ring, the denizens of the Central Ring battle for resources, technology and simple survival in an increasingly dangerous environment. As their worlds are drawn inexorably inward, the awesome forces around them grow in strength. Planets suffer gravitational fluxes and seis-

mic tremors; the ground writhes and buckles, cracking open and spewing forth magma. Terrible gas and dust storms envelop worlds, scouring their surfaces. Meteors the size of continents unleash death with random impacts.

As worlds are drawn inward, toward the Maw, fewer and fewer survive. Life-forms are forced into an ever-narrowing range of ecological niches. Battles become more desperate, and safe havens become more precious.

As always, there are those who thrive in this environment. A number of beings have adapted to the rigors of life in the Central Ring, and others possess the technology to move freely from one section of the Maelstrom to another. The relatively close proximity of objects in the Central Ring makes exploration quicker and easier than in the outer reaches of the Maelstrom. Enterprising salvage crews venture into the Central Ring to seek technological treasures and, if they survive, are often rewarded for their efforts. Some races have set up outposts and refuges in the Central Ring to use as bases of operations for assaults on territories that lie further out from the Maw. They risk destruction by choosing to dwell closer to the core, but they also discourage invasion by living in a dangerous, less accessible environment.

Like the Outer Ring, the Central Ring contains a number of anomalies. What appears to be a portal of some sort occasionally appears, releasing streams of anti-matter and causing untold devastation. The portal may be a gateway out of the Maelstrom, but the anti-matter it spits makes investigation too dangerous. If it is an exit, it isn't a very feasible one.

A gigantic mass that appears to be composed of knotted vegetation orbits near the outermost edge of the Central Ring. This region, known as *the Tangle*, is a colossal web of enormous branches and hardy space-faring vines that have knotted together around a number of large, rocky bodies. The Tangle is nearly the size of a small moon and grows continuously, snaring passing objects and incorporating them into its ever-growing mass. Things crawl among its leaves and branches—things that fight and struggle and occasionally build.

One of the most intriguing phenomenon within the Central Ring is a group of planetoids that lies near its innermost edge. These objects appear to rotate in the wrong direction as compared to the entities around them. However, this is not the case. Instead, all nine planetoids in this region are at complete rest while the Maelstrom whirls about them. Like rocks in a stream, they stand still while planetary objects, storms and even tendrils of energy from the Maw pass by, leaving them untouched.

This cluster of planetoids has drawn great interest from some of the races in the Maelstrom, but they are difficult, if not impossible, to reach. The cluster lies near the heart of a tremendous, centuries-old cloud of electromagnetic energy. The eddies of this storm occasionally swirl open, creating a clear entryway, but they quickly close again with renewed ferocity.

Massive chunks of battered, charred rock hurtle past him as his consciousness soars through the Central Ring. He scans his surroundings recklessly, losing patience with his task. The search is fruitless. The object they seek, the key to their salvation, does not exist. How could it? They have searched for centuries and found nothing. Surely if such a powerful, miraculous object existed they would have discovered it by now.

He pushes such thoughts aside, unwilling to surrender to despair. Ahead, at the fringes of his perception, he senses something of interest. The wandering debris of a thousand worlds roars past him as he speeds forward. Within seconds, he has reached his goal.

The wreckage of a colossal ship drifts before him. It is dead, an enormous ruin of shattered towers and twisted metal. Its hull is a mutilated mass, battered by countless meteor strikes and torn asunder by the mighty forces that surround it.

It is an unlikely location for that which he seeks. For that very reason, he chooses to investigate.

The inside of the ship, like the outside, is completely mauled. Wires and fiberoptics hang in loose clumps from the walls, cables charred by electrical fires are strewn across the floor. Broken equipment, shards of glass, melted metal, bits of plastic and droplets of frozen liquid float past him … and there is something else.

The mangled bodies of the crew are everywhere: floating, bumping, hanging in tangles of wire and cable. They are frozen and mummified. Their thick bones and ropy limbs are unfamiliar. He has not encountered this species before.

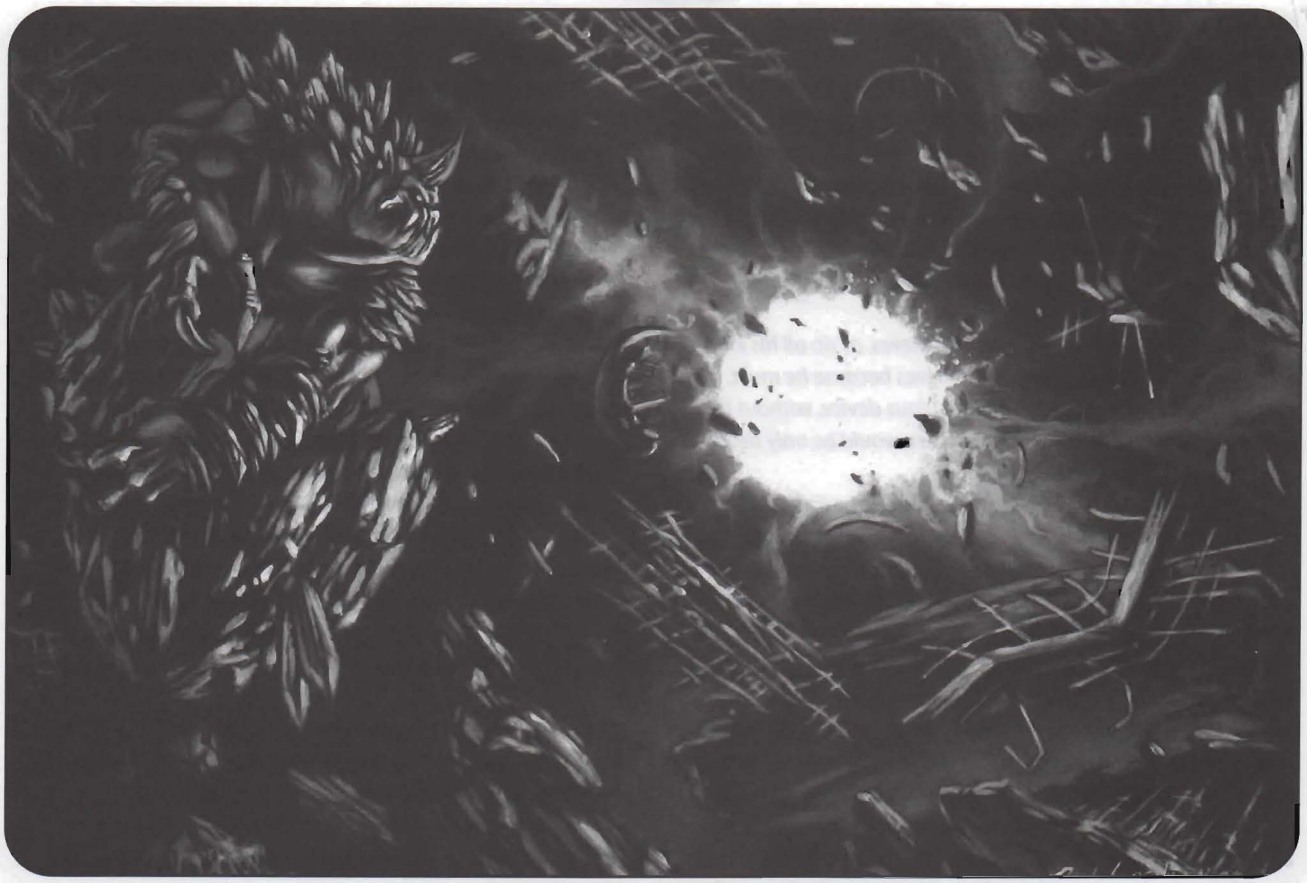
The ship is an artifact of significant age, and has clearly been adrift in the Central Ring for a long time. He wonders, briefly, how its crew perished and what they were like when they were alive. Then, not truly interested, he begins carefully probing the ruined vessel.

His mind glides through miles of massive, metallic chambers, decorated with bizarre glyphs and forms. He briefly examines unusual mechanisms and curious, unfathomable technology, then moves on. Towering machines, rusted and collapsing with age, line the walls of the ship's engineering section. Once they must have hummed with life, generating the powerful energies required to push this mammoth ship through space. Now, like the beings that manufactured them, they are completely devoid of life or energy. Even the stench of death has long since departed. His brief hope that perhaps the object was here, in the hands of these departed aliens, ends in disappointment. He has failed again, finding only a gargantuan tomb of an enigmatic race of beings that escaped from the Maelstrom by the only means known: death.

Frustrated, he casts his mind elsewhere.

THE INNER RING

As objects journey through the Central Ring and achieve tighter orbital revolutions around the Maw, they are gradually eroded into smaller fragments by the powerful forces around them. By the time the Central Ring gives way



to the Inner Ring, nothing remains whole and even objects the size of large asteroids are rare.

The Inner Ring of the Maelstrom is a gigantic debris field filled with broken worlds and shredded technology. Few life-forms survive here, as pockets of stability rarely last. It is a hostile environment, a nightmare made frighteningly real. As objects move through the Inner Ring and begin the final plunge to obliteration in the Maw, they are fused together by immense pressure and ripped apart with nearly indescribable violence. Matter is heated, melted, shattered and crushed in a frenzied display of destructive force. The steady pull of the Maw and the proximity of its awesome power make the Inner Ring a cosmic Hell, a vast, tormented realm where world-shattering storms of energy lash out angrily at the remnants of once-great planets.

Escape from the Inner Ring is virtually impossible. Once objects enter this region of the Maelstrom, they are almost certainly doomed. They whirl about in vast eddies, smashing into one another in and spinning off again. Occasionally, fragments coalesce into larger bodies, only to be demolished by the mighty forces that rage all around them. Clouds of gas, dust and plasma swirl about, and electrical storms flash amidst the madness. Tendrils of energy lash out from the Maw, stirring the turbulent debris into purposeless chaos. Disturbances within the Inner Ring occasionally hurl a stream of debris or even a large fragment out of the system entirely, sending it crashing through the Central and Outer Rings to take up a new position or be sucked back in toward the Maw.

Ultimately, the Inner Ring is nothing more than a churning, boiling furnace where matter is tormented and broken down into sustenance for the insatiable Maw. However, like the rest of the Maelstrom, the Inner Ring is home to inexplicable phenomena.

A large planetesimal, known as the *Near-Maw Manifestation* (or NMM) has been observed orbiting deep in the Inner Ring, floating among the vapor and rubble near the Maw itself. The NMM is the only object of its size to be seen in the Inner Ring, and its presence so close to the Maw, in what appears to be a stable orbit, is inexplicable.

Even more mysterious is the anomaly known as *the Beacon*. The Beacon occupies a large section of the Inner Ring and hurtles in stationary orbit around the Maw at incredible speeds. As it moves, it emits irregular pulses of energy along every perceivable wavelength, with such power that it is easily detectable against the chaotic roar of electromagnetic noise pouring from the Maw. It defies analysis, but it is clearly not a pulsar or similar burnt-out star. Like so many aspects of the Maelstrom, the Beacon remains an enigma.

Hesitantly, he pushes inward, past the static cluster of planetoids at the innermost edge of the Central Ring. The object he seeks is not large, and it could easily lie within the spinning

debris fields of the Inner Ring. He has been here before, and it is an unnerving place.

But it is his duty to explore every possibility, to thoroughly investigate any potential hiding place, to seek anywhere and everywhere until the object is found. Yet he does not believe it lies here in the Inner Ring. In his heart, he despairs that the object was destroyed centuries ago, consumed by the Maw. However, his duty is to seek, and so he searches, as he has for centuries, hoping against all odds that it still exists, that it can and will be found.

The object. It is a legend, but he believes, as do all his kind, that it is based in fact. Perhaps he believes because he must. Without the existence of such a miraculous device, without the chance at redemption it represents, there would be only despair.

It will be found. He will find it.

With renewed determination, he probes the Inner Ring, scouring every crevice, exploring every rogue asteroid large enough to contain the magnificent prize he seeks.

Around him, the Maelstrom howls ferally, flaunting its power. It screeches cosmic obscenities, taunting him with tantalizing leads and frustrating dead ends. Scavengers—huge, colorful ovoid creatures—dart and dodge amidst the rapidly traveling fragments, seeking sustenance in the disorder. He pauses in his search, momentarily marveling at the tenacity of life. Even here, in the roaring chaos of the Inner Ring, life endures.

There is no sign of the object. He considers pushing deeper, closer to the Maw itself. Though he is little more than projected consciousness, he cannot bring himself to brave the furious light of that vast malignancy. His encounter with the ancient, subterranean entity in the Outer Ring has left him cautious. If its powerful mind was able to sense him, to exert its hideous influence, what might the Maw be capable of?

As if in response to his thoughts, there is a blinding flash, a release of energy, as a tendril of the Maw flails into the Inner Ring. Reality shifts around him. Huge chunks of rock seem to occupy the same space simultaneously, merging and twisting into new forms. His surroundings phase in and out. He sees two scavengers, their forms fused together in a hideous mockery of nature as they scream past him and explode into a hundred tiny life-forms which in turn become molten balls of rock. Faces seem to leer at him from the blazing white light. His surroundings are rearranged into a thousand new configurations. His consciousness is hurled into an asteroid, a gas cloud, a plasma burst, and for one brief instant he is all of these things. He feels his mind bent and stretched, torn from his control and warped into something new, something alien and unfamiliar. He is scintillant light and radiation. He is ancient stone. He screams and screams and screams.

THE MAW

Nothing escapes the Maw. It is an unimaginably powerful beast that rages at the heart of the Maelstrom. With the furious power of a million suns, it consumes everything that comes near it. It is an anomaly, an enigma. Reality itself is bent and twisted by the Maw's hideous power. Strange tentacles of energy writhe across its white-hot surface, seeming to take on an almost malevolent intelligence as it carries on its destructive work. These tentacles flail and lash out into the vortex, warping reality, accelerating or decelerating time and rearranging space and matter into tormented, mind-shattering configurations. Gravity, light and time mean nothing to such a force.

The Maw appears to influence everything in the Maelstrom. It stirs the vortex around it, creating storms and drawing objects inward to destruction. It is the Maw that draws planets into the Maelstrom, the Maw that destroys worlds with inexplicable, indescribable force, the Maw that ultimately determines who lives and who dies. It is the ultimate singularity, an inscrutable object at the core of a universe that *should not exist*. To some denizens of the Maelstrom, the Maw is a god, a malevolent intelligence whose will restructures the very universe around them. To others, it is the embodiment of pure evil. To most, it is a natural force that defies the laws of nature, a nightmare from which there is no escape. It is unknowable, unbelievable, unstoppable.

It *is* the Maelstrom.

He awakens to warmth, surrounded by amber light. He can feel hands upon him, thoughts reaching out and touching his own. Warmth. Amber light. Unconsciousness.

Later he awakes. He finds his way back to the room and sits down. His nerves twitch, his vision blurs. His insides knot in fear. He hides it all.

"Are you prepared? Can you do this?" the Monitor asks.

He hesitates.

"It is too soon," the Monitor says. "I will find another. You should rest."

"No," he says. "I am ready."

"Very well."

His long, golden fingers grasp the padded arm of the chair. He breathes deeply, relaxing, and settles back. Closing his eyes, he casts his mind into the Maelstrom.

Once again, the formless, gray wall of the Veil fills his vision. Once again, he summons his resolve and begins the search. He peers into the hazy, ill-defined sooty nothingness, sensing something. As he watches, he can see, as if through murky water, a large object materializing. He quietly observes as the object takes form, coalescing out of nothing, surrounded by the insubstantial, dark-gray matter of the Veil.

Slowly, the object forms, moving toward him as it comes into being. It is huge, a planet. He watches in awe as it moves forward, quickly traversing the distance between its entry point and the edge of the Veil.

He observes, as he has so many times before, the parting of the Veil's curtain. A cloudy blue world, accompanied by a smaller gray satellite, pushes through the Veil and is reborn into the Maelstrom.

He turns away, and renews the search.

TERRA DESCENDING

A pair of grenades detonated to his right, scarring the earth, their shrapnel ripping into two of his comrades and leaving them stretched on the ground broken and bloodied. Sergei Moratov threw himself into a trench cut by the spring floods washing down out of the Taihang Shan mountains, falling in next to another soldier of the Ninety-second Vanguard. The dry earth caking the sides of the ditch crumbled, exposing soft mud beneath. He felt the moisture soaking through his uniform, smelled the foul scent of old mud through his mask. Something had to happen soon. The Chinese had deployed in massive force to meet the Ninety-second, and now were close to overrunning the Neo-Soviet position.

As if echoing his thought, the rim of the trench exploded under the onslaught of a Chinese heavy assault rifle, dirt geysering into the air as bullets tore into the ground and whistled uncomfortably close overhead. Both men rolled and scrambled further along the trench, their Kalashnikovs held in white-knuckled grips.

Sergei's body protested the rough treatment, aching in every joint and most muscles. He was fairly certain he'd sprained his right ankle on his last dive for cover. At fifty-three, he was too old for such activity. All of them were. The Ninety-second was comprised entirely of older men. And war was a young man's game.

He heard the echoing thumps of mortar fire over the concussive blast of another brace of grenades. No, not a game. A young man's nightmare.

But patriots did not refuse duty, and in the Neo-Soviet Empire it was always safer to be a patriot. Patriots did not disappear in the night. Patriots never stood trial before the military court of General-President Gregori Vanivar. Sergei had heard many of Vanivar's early speeches. Memorized them. The failed Russian Republic had needed a life line to grab hold of, and Vanivar was their best hope for recovery. A Russian hope. Not that the United States, hiding behind its NATO shield, had even offered its help. No, they were content to ruin the second-greatest power Terra had ever known. Ruin and pity it, and then make it the butt of jokes and hold it up as an example of a failed system.

It was no wonder that Vanivar's militaristic dogma had sunk its teeth into the old republic with such a terrifying hold. Even Sergei had marched and sang and worked all the harder for Vanivar. As a proletarian supporter, Sergei had dedicated the life of his first son to Mother Russia, when China first resisted efforts to unite their two countries. Then his second. Then his daughter. He believed she was still alive, fighting over in Ningxia at last report. Perhaps there had been another way to survive the new regime, but if so it was too late. When your back is to the wall, even the pardon of a man such as Vanivar is welcome. No matter that the General-President had told a few lies. They were on your behalf, weren't they?

Usually. Though now Sergei was doubting everything. The wetness soaking in at his elbows and knees worried him. Was he crawling through one of the chemical weapons the Neo-Soviet army frequently employed? Aerosol. Sergei remembered something about them promising airborne delivery. So he couldn't be contaminated through his clothing so long as he kept his mask in place. But he could smell the stench of the disturbed mud, and it made him wonder if his mask was functioning properly.

Those worries disappeared with the flash of light that suddenly filled the overcast sky with a reddish glow. His comrade had just eased up over the rim of the trench to fire off a burst at the Chinese, and now fell back clawing at his eyes and screaming. Worried that they now faced some new trick, Sergei clambered up the side of the trench to check the Chinese positions himself.

The cloud hung over the horizon in a pillar of reddish fire, blossoming out thousands of feet into the atmosphere. About where the fortified city of Taiyuan stood. Had stood. The Chinese soldiers, caught in the middle of their charge, were stunned into inaction.

Sergei could have cut them all down with his Kalashnikov, except he too was frozen. Thoughts raced through his head. An entire vanguard of older men, run through the briefest training and deployed in a problem area. Just enough of a force to lure several Chinese divisions into a small area. Just one more lie. He looked up into the red-tinged heavens, hoping to see speedy deliverance. Then the second and third missiles streaked down from the sky, new blossoms of nuclear fire opened up over the battlefield and intense heat washed across—

* * *

—the United Nations assembly in a thunderous ovation. The President of the United States—now his president as well—waved down the applause. Reluctantly, Major Armando Luiz sat down. He didn't even try to stem the proud flush that continued to warm him.

To be present for this moment, as part of Mexico's delegation to the United Nations, when Mexico was raised to a parity with the United States, and Canada as well, was nothing short of a godsend. By the reaction of the majority of the U.N. representatives, Major Luiz believed that most thoughts echoed his own. Not only did this mean great things for his country, which had envied the States' prosperity and leadership role in the world for his entire lifetime and more, the career officer could hope this union might offer some form of balance to the Earth.

The Neo-Soviet nuclear attack on China had shocked so many people. So many North Americans. Mexico, situated above the struggling countries of Central America who continued to flirt with Communism and worshipped military might, had always known the threat of forced compliance. Had waited for the day when the Soviet Union—old or new—would provide weapons of mass destruction to their southern neighbors. Now his country had less to fear, and a greater voice in the world. Nearly all of Asia belonged to the Neo-Soviet Empire now. But against the trinity of the three North American countries, they could be held in check. They had to be held in check.

The Mexican president—now vice-president of the Union Interior—had accepted the podium. The major had missed his opening statement, but quickly focused his attention on the leader.

"In a world where such crimes go unpunished and threaten the safety of our own borders, we must do more than endeavor to persevere. We must act, and we will act, by the dictates of our conscience and our duties as representatives for the people of North America and anywhere we may be needed. So help us God."

Major Luiz crossed himself as applause thundered again, then joined in a standing ovation for his former president. Certainly it never hurt to enlist—

* * *

—God. The villagers called out to him repeatedly as the strange storm broke over Novo Cocarada and the blazing white scar of energies fell from the sky. A riot of lightning played at its edges. Hard winds hammered straight down against the small African fishing village, flattening dilapidated homes and knocking many from their feet. Still no one ran.

There was no place to run.

Most of the villagers had lived their lives in dread of such an end, under the threat of being caught in the war between Union and Empire. So many years of tensions, of skirmishes and full-fledged battles. One of those fought on African soil, when the United African States called to the Union for help. The village had given three young men to the fight, a significant loss of manpower. It seemed as if time had run out, though, and Novo Cocarada would not recover this time. And how many more villages? How many lives?

The people despaired and railed at the fates which had turned so cruel, spending their last few seconds in hopeless panic. They had no way of knowing that this was no battle. No secret weapon turned on them by accident or design. It was a simple prelude to the coming storm.

Nothing personal.

The fortunate ones were lost to insanity before the wall of energies slammed into the Earth, bringing with it the cold—

* * *

—touch of a Siberian wind. It rose in one final gust, tugging at Dita's long hair, then fell still. She glanced around, suddenly uncertain. The hairs along the back of her neck prickled. The colonel had given orders to hold, though the vanguard's contingent of rad troopers had already broken lines to rush the enemy. The damage being worked against

EARTH CHANGES

When the Maelstrom pulled the Earth into its domain, it did more than simply alter the planet's position on the cosmic map. Indeed, although Earth has been in the Maelstrom for more than ten years now, new Change-related phenomena still appear with some frequency around the globe. Most of the changes have been fairly harmless, if somewhat bizarre. However, there have been a number of massive upheavals resulting in widespread death and suffering. Listed below are a few of the more noteworthy changes that have manifested since Earth's arrival in the Maelstrom.

Intense Weather

The weather actually began to intensify slowly over the century prior to Earth's induction, and some theorize that this was a kind of precursor to events that were to come. The weather changes consist of a general magnification of the existing weather systems across the globe; hot areas became hotter, cold areas became colder, storms became notably stronger and so on.

Planetquakes

Earthquakes of all sizes rattled the surface of Earth during the Change, and in many areas the aftershocks and tremors continue to this day. These planetquakes have caused severe damage in nearly every major city of the world. The quakes that struck Japan were particularly devastating; when the dust settled, the mainland of Japan had been utterly annihilated. The tremors that still rock the area today are powerful enough to make rebuilding an impossible task.

Sleeper Pods

When the Earth materialized in the Maelstrom, a number of podlike structures fused with the landscape. It was later discovered that these pods were life-forms that had been lying in a dormant state—hence the name "sleepers." A few of these creatures awakened soon after the Change, creating much havoc before they could be neutralized. The exact number of sleeper pods that are currently on the planet is unknown.

Alien Fungus

The jungles of South America have been overrun with an alien life-form of unknown origin. The fungus is so dense, and its growth rate so quick, that numerous villages and communities have been forced to abandon their homes and move to safer regions. There are reports of small outbreaks of the fungus-like growth appearing in several other regions, as well.

Alien Artifacts

Numerous alien structures, objects and other bizarre debris have been spotted around the globe. Although most of these are harmless oddities, some have resulted in deaths and hardship for those living nearby. The ebony obelisk that materialized in a cliff face in Peru, for example, has been responsible for the deaths of thousands of locals, as the object apparently emits lethal levels of an unknown energy type. All attempts to get near or study the object have failed.

Crystalline Growth

The Earth and its moon have both experienced an outbreak of crystalline growth on their surfaces. The crystal substance grows over and replaces the existing landscape, leaving strange crystal versions of the local flora and fauna in its place. The exact composition of this material has not been determined, but Union scientists have detected in the crystals a unique energy emission that concerns them greatly.

their forces was heavy, with the booming reports of assault rifles already dropping off, overwhelmed by the higher-pitched bursts from Union Pitbull assault rifles. Why the cessation of an unwelcome breeze should suddenly worry her, the rank-and-file soldier had no idea.

And then the sky fell away.

The brooding clouds, which had been tinged with a strange red, now suddenly congealed into bloody clots. The stained cumulus was snatched upward, as if plucked, draining into a sky bleached bone-white. No color. No clouds. No sun. An empty sky. A dead sky. The fighting trailed off as every soldier on the field stared into that abyss, and Dita became aware of the noise. The echoing crash of continuous thunder, overshadowed by earlier weapons fire and now

building to a violent level until it crashed over the field.

Long scars of crackling energy broke across the dead sky, opening wounds that revealed a darkness behind. Dita stared through the atmosphere and directly into a night sky, into space, though space unlike any she had ever known. A space that had volume rather than vacuum, dark and thick as ink with no stars. Pooling in bottomless chasms now poised malevolently over Terra. Then the pools spilled over, and the dark matter poured across the sky. Staining it.

"By the burning light," she muttered, the old oath slipping from her as she dropped to her knees, legs suddenly weak. "What have they done?" By reflex she blamed the Union, for a few seconds certain that the enemy had unleashed a terrible new weapon against the empire. Then her senses returned. This was nothing made by man or science. This was terrifying. Fears, made physical. An impersonal death, spreading across the sky. Tendrils of space reaching down—dripping down—to splash a darkness over the ground. Smothering—

* * *

—her youngest against her shoulder, Marie Loudon huddled on the marble steps of Bristol's largest Catholic church. Susan, her eldest, she held in a tight embrace to her side as mother and daughter watched the chaos unfold around them. Morning services had just ended, and Marie had been planning the day's shopping as the priest offered his final blessings. Now she wished she had accepted them a bit more readily.

The sky burned, a swirling mass of yellow and red. Where the strange storm occasionally parted, there was a hazy gray veil behind the sky. The air itself seemed to glow, bathing the world in gray except for the sky above. Intense winds punished the city, screaming down the streets to overturn automobiles and slam people into walls. Marie could hear its raging howl and see the debris tearing along at torrential speeds, though not the smallest breeze touched her. The fury seemed to part around the church, as if refusing to touch it. It was a small miracle in the face of a terrifying scene.

Susan noticed it first, tugging at her mother's hair and pointing over a rise of flats to the east. The sky's riotous swirl of colors parted like water beneath a ship's prow, carving a channel kilometers wide that passed directly overhead. This break in the storm was not the bleak gray she had seen before, but a dense black pricked with two or three points of light. And along that swath, as if pulled by a lodestone, came the eye. A searing white scar, larger than the sun but misshapen. It burned with a cold fury, looking down upon the Earth while tracking rapidly across the sky. The colorless glow brightened for a moment with a touch of real color as it passed overhead, though Marie thought the return of color no favor. Not from this. This is what brought the chaos, she knew. Though no rational evidence supported her thought, she still knew.

"What is it, Mama?" Susan was enthralled, staring straight into the hideous maw as it passed overhead and continued to track westward. The passage of a day in less than a minute. A single bright entity, carving the heavens. "Is it God?"

Marie shuddered for that question, and pulled her daughters closer to her. "No, baby. Whatever it is, it is not—"

* * *

"—anything we can explain."

Tamas Yorikev paced a tight square in the cramped bunker, jaw clenched so tight that his teeth ground painfully. The general considered himself the most powerful man on Luna, the larger Union presence notwithstanding. It was his plan. They were his troops. What he would accomplish someday would vindicate that belief in himself.

Still, he could command no better answer from the puling scientists or the military aides at his disposal.

"My base is being shaken apart," he growled. "The entire moon trembles, and if the warrens collapse our plans—my plans—will be ruined." The warrens. Living quarters cut into Luna's depths over five years, as every shuttle brought more rad troops, Vanguard and mutants. He had gathered enough manpower to take Luna for the empire. Perhaps. Another six months and he would be certain of victory. If it was not all snatched cruelly away from him here and now. He walked over to a monitor that showed an intelligence feed tapped into Union sources. The space over Luna remained black and impenetrable. "The Union is behind this. I know it."

Captain Dimitri Palasovich was not so certain. "Our tap into their communications suggests otherwise, Comrade-General. They seem as hard-struck by this as we are." He quailed under Yorikev's stare. "We could move the troops to the surface. If the warrens fall, they would at least be safe."

"And the next satellite to pass overhead would see them, and the Union would know I have massed a new army here." Yorikev slashed one large hand through the air. "I am surrounded by fools." Yet there it was—he had only two options. Risk losing the entire army, or expose it now and hope it would pass unnoticed in the chaos reigning over Luna.

Or … "We attack."

Half a dozen of his aides turned to regard their commanding officer as if he were insane. The general could almost read their thoughts. Attack? With no open lines of communication to the empire? No one to give the order, and organize support if it became necessary? Yorikev laughed then, and it was a hard, cold sound. He could give the order. "Dimitri, you say they are as disorganized as we are. You are willing to stake your life on that?"

Of course. He already had, the moment he made the declaration earlier. The captain nodded. "Da, Comrade-General."

"Good. You will lead the assault against Tranquility Base." He enjoyed the way Dimitri's face paled at the thought of facing off against the Union general. "Smile, Dimitri Palasovich. I will write you into the empire's history books. One way, or another.

"Clear the warrens. We attack—"

* * *

—when the sun would normally be setting over the Pacific. A splash of crimson and gold across the sky, reaching over the Olympic Peninsula and out toward the Cascade Range. David Kelso's favorite time of the day. Until this evening of two sunsets. Or three, if he counted the burning glow to the south. Where beautiful Seattle once stood.

David now stumbled around in the bowl-shaped depression where the lake had been. The water was gone, and the ground flash-dried into hardened clay and mud. A forest of emerald crystals grew in place of the lake, filling the bed with a labyrinth of angular constructions. David vaguely remembered the water suddenly flowing away, up into the sky. A giant wave rolling along a new surface, at odds with gravity and the Earth's physical boundaries. That was after the first sunset, and before the storm. He remembered a disconnected feeling swallowing him then, setting his mind adrift in a numbing vacuum. How long he existed like that, David wasn't certain. Consciousness returned slowly, and left him standing in the one remaining room of his Lake Stevens home.

The rest was simply gone. The living room area remained, as if cut away from the rest of the house. One wall he thought open to the outside had actually been covered with a thin sheet of crystal that shattered at his touch. As fine as a spider's web, it also lacked the strength to cut. He had tried to pick up pieces of the crystal, but they instantly pulverized into a fine dust.

Then the missiles hit Seattle.

Three large mushroom clouds, billowing into the atmosphere over Puget Sound and creating a second, violent sunset. That had been enough to cut through the shock of the moment and allow him to think clearly again. He called out for help, but no one answered. A few moments later, a gust of warm wind straggled over the storm-ravaged Lake Stevens area. Then nothing. No lights. No phone left to try calling. David's car still stood in the drive, but it wouldn't start. Nothing to do but wait. Almost nothing.

It was avoiding that second sunset that drove him into the lake bed to explore the crystalline forest. A blazing white scar in the heavens, about where the sun would normally drop beyond the horizon, drifting down as if chasing the Earth's source of light and life to the other side of the Pacific. Two, perhaps three times as large as the sun, but irregular. Pulsing. In a way harder to look at, an eye-searing brilliance to it, yet not providing quite as much light.

A malevolent eye keeping watch over the Earth.

David didn't feel well. Was it the crystal growth, rising up around him like some strange forest of Oz? Fallout? Had the Neo-Soviet Empire spread new contaminants? He swallowed down his rising gorge, then turned to catch his bearings and head back to what was left of his home. The twisting paths under crystalline archways and around thick clusters of the growths confused him. Or was it just the lightheadedness? He stumbled on until the ground gave way beneath his feet and David slipped into a crevice. A rough surface tore at his hands and face as he slid along a curved spine of rock and into a narrowing gap. He finally wedged in between a small emerald outcropping and the wall of earth behind him. His mind spun. No strength left to climb—hard enough just to breathe.

And he wasn't even sure what was killing him.

He'd had a brief glimpse of something nestled in the crystal maze, something that had hollowed out a bed in the lake. Large, like a tractor-trailer rig. Not smooth, not exactly. Kind of round. Even—

* * *

"—egg-shaped. It took us too long to realize it was there, and the sleeper inside tore free this morning."

Colonel Elias Denning set down his laser pointer on the nearby table. He could see that most of his officers were still eyeing the blurry pictures of a similar creature. Like nothing ever seen on Earth. Alien. This one fought by the Seventy-first Assault Group, Colonel Sainz's outfit. He seemed a good man—Denning had met him once before the changes. Before what the scientists were calling the Induction.

"You've all been briefed on radcon procedures," he said, drawing their attention away from the photos and sketches. "Seattle took it hard, and Cheyenne believes the creature will head right into that mess. To feed. We can't let it get in there. They are trying to task Station Independence on-site for support, but we can't afford to wait for that to happen." He let the news sink in; that this time the Vancouver Recon Force would be on its own.

"Go brief your men. The clock starts running in thirty minutes, and then we'll see what you learned fighting the Neo-Sovs off B.C.

"Dismissed."

CREATURES AND LOCATIONS

The Maelstrom is abundant with warped and mysterious landscapes, many of them populated by nightmarish creatures from thousands of worlds. The Maelstrom's voracious appetite pulls planets and life-forms from across the known universe, mashing them together in an apocalyptic war for survival. Almost any setting or critter imaginable probably exists somewhere within the Maelstrom.

LOCATIONS

Whether exotically beautiful or incredibly dangerous, every location in the Maelstrom is a potential battlefield. The following entries represent a few of the many and varied landscapes that can be encountered.

ALIEN RUINS

The process of being inducted into the Maelstrom, also known as The Crossing, is a violent event. Unlike most worlds, Earth survived being pulled into the Maelstrom mostly intact. Those worlds that were not so lucky suffered various fates: some were completely destroyed as they arrived in the Maelstrom too close to another planet and were drawn by gravitic tension into a monumental collision; some were changed dramatically, where seismic or volcanic activity made the atmosphere toxic or killed a vital part of the planet's ecosystem; on still other worlds, civilizations were set back hundreds of years or their cultures were reduced to primitive levels.

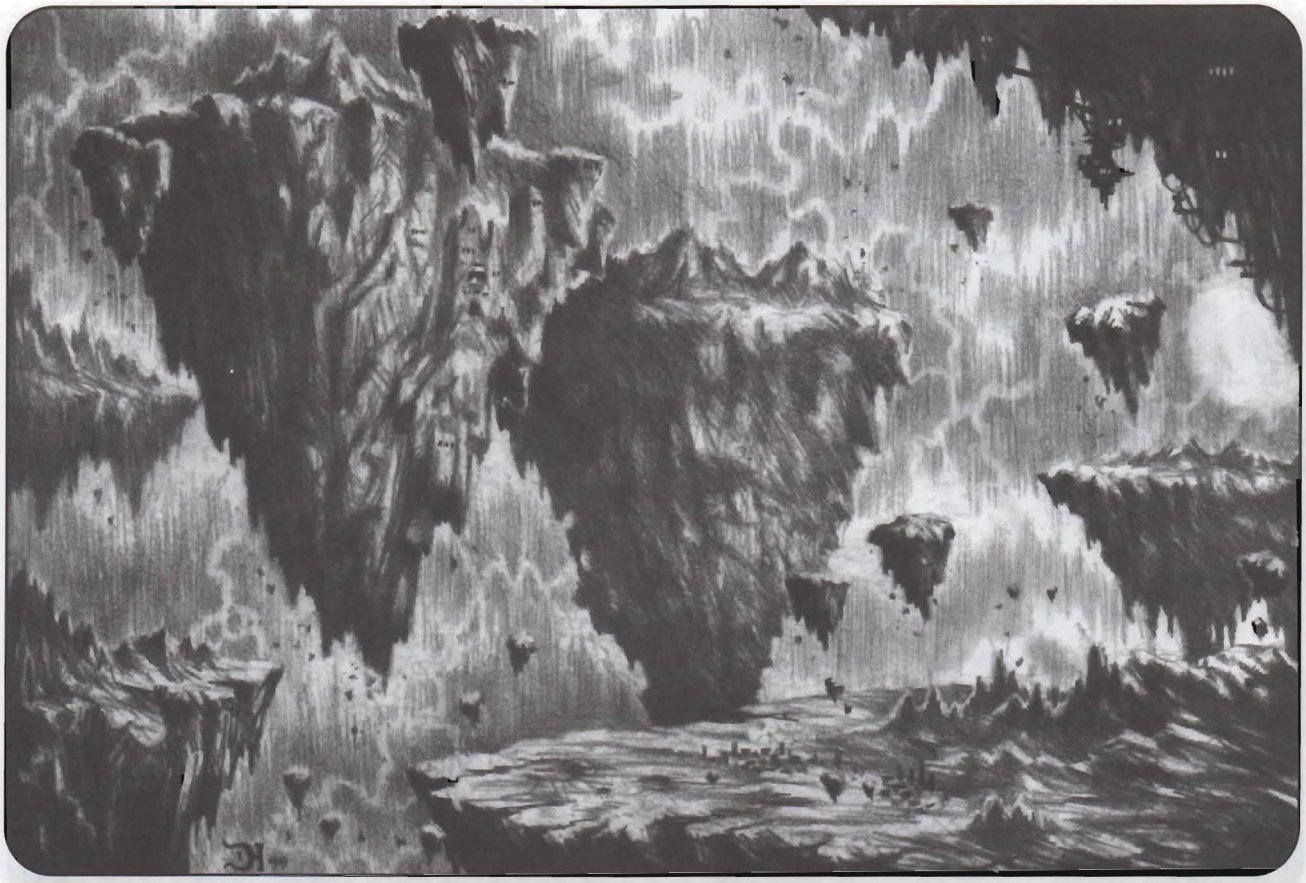
As a result, the Maelstrom is dotted with countless worlds bearing the remains of shattered alien civilizations. Many of these still contain powerful technology waiting to be rediscovered, a priceless prize to whatever race finds it. Some races in the Maelstrom have made monumental technological leaps based on equipment or tech harvested from some long-dead alien world. For example, scouting parties often unearth superior energy generators and powerful weaponry, as well as unknown alloys and construction materials. Because available resources and technological superiority can make or break a culture's chances for survival in the Maelstrom, such ruins can mean life or death for the exploratory teams that find them.

It is worth noting that not all of these ruins are uninhabited. Many primitive, deadly and highly territorial life-forms take up habitation in the damaged remains of these extinct cultures. Some ruins still contain remnants of the races that built them, small tribes made savage by the experience of The Crossing. Even those empty cities free of intelligent life may be protected by automated sentinels, alien guard beasts, traps and other anti-intrusion technology. Extreme caution is advised for any team investigating the ruins of an unknown race, lest they end up as extinct as the race whose treasures they seek.

PLATEAUS OF NIMBUS

Most scientists believe that the plateaus hovering in the atmosphere of Nimbus are immense pieces of the planet's crust that broke loose when the world was pulled into the Maelstrom. A collision with a smaller planetoid might also have caused the breakup of the planet, but neither theory explains why the plateaus remain floating together above the planet. One likely explanation is that the strong magnetic properties of the abundant minerals in the plateaus attract and repel one another in equal measure. Regardless of the reason, the effect is that of an enormous upside-down mountain range hovering in the remainder of the atmosphere.

Small animals, scraggly plant life and insects are all that remain of the native life once plentiful on these flat-topped formations, but the plateaus are rich in mineral resources, making them a prime destination for scavenging crews and mining teams from many races. The same magnetic reso-



nance that probably holds the plateaus in formation, however, also shuts down any sensitive electronic equipment. As a result, aircraft must be manually piloted onto the surfaces of the gargantuan rocks, and the minerals gathered with jackhammer and pick or other rudimentary tools. This difficulty has kept the plateaus from being mined into oblivion by the various technologically capable races who have uses for the valuable ores found there.

THE RIFT

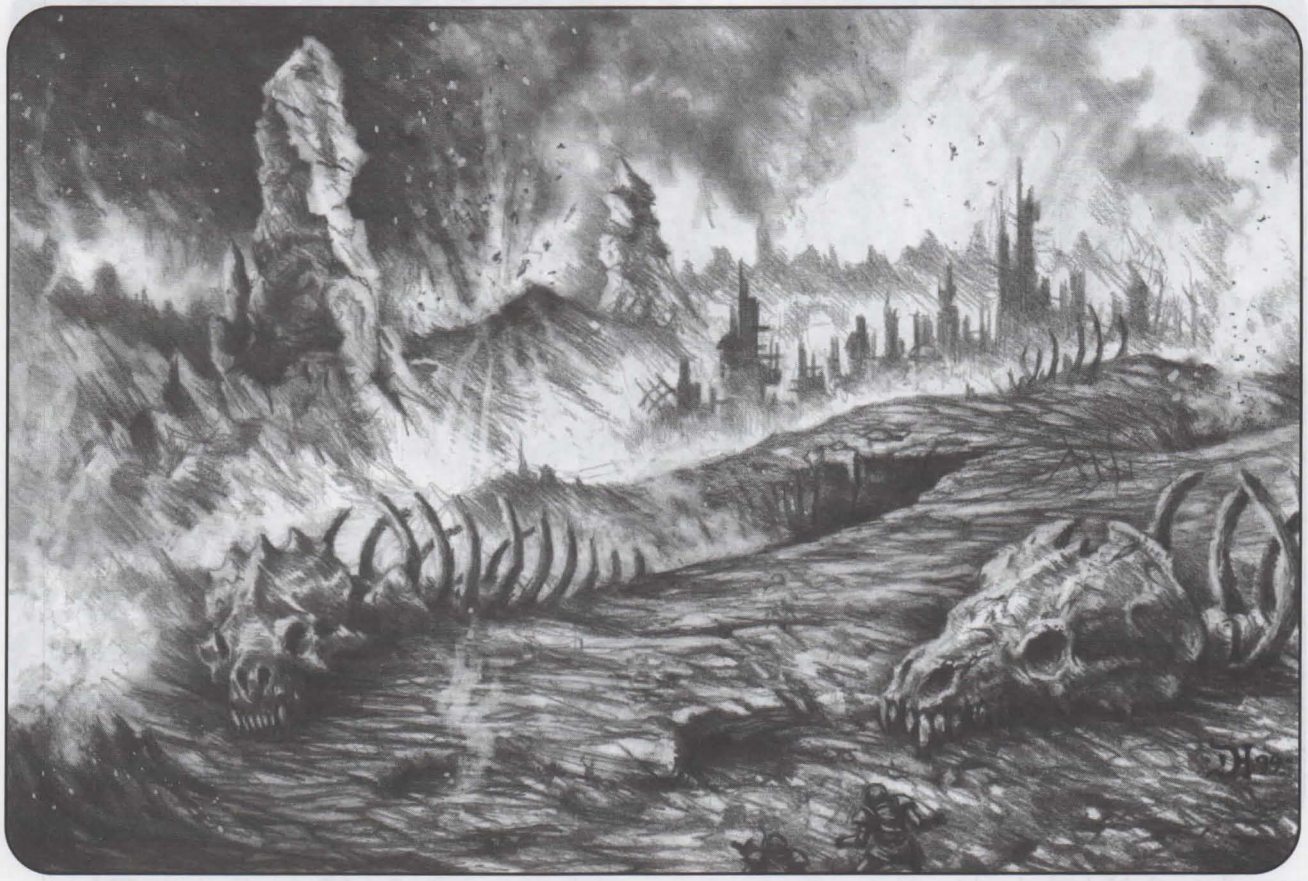
The Rift lies deep within the Central Ring of the Maelstrom. It is a gigantic tear in space, a gaping white wound in reality through which particles of anti-matter and powerful energies flow into the Maelstrom. It exists at the center of a miniature nebula, wrapped in insubstantial clouds of free-floating gas. The energy flowing from the Rift is diffused through the nebula, creating a cosmic light show of spectacular, ever-changing colors.

Chunks of floating debris drift into the nebula, apparently drawn toward the Rift. Occasionally, this detritus drifts too close to the Rift itself and is destroyed by the potent energy emanating from the anomaly. When large chunks of debris are destroyed, the resulting explosions ignite fields of gas in the nebula, triggering deadly blasts of light and radiation that can be seen far into the Maelstrom's Outer Ring. In rare instances, matter that drifts too close to the Rift is actually drawn into it, to an unknown fate.

Strange lights dart through the nebulous gas clouds surrounding the Rift; these are particularly active near the Rift itself. These flickering lights may be life-forms, or perhaps they are simply highly charged matter, galvanized into motion by the swirling energy radiating from the Rift. Their true nature is impossible to determine.

Several races have shown intense interest in the Rift, but its unstable nature and the deadly energy it emits make it difficult to study. However, its potential as a power source—or, more importantly, as a possible exit from the Maelstrom—proves irresistible. Whatever the Rift is, it leads somewhere. The matter and energy that flow from its blinding interior come from beyond the Maelstrom.

The exact nature of the Rift is unknown. It may be a portal to another dimension, a potential means of escape from the Maelstrom, or it may represent an immature singularity, a secondary Maw that never developed into the frightening beast that burns at the heart of the Maelstrom. It could be the lasting result of a failed experiment or a doomed attempt at escape. Whatever it is, it shines like a brilliant, white-hot scar in space, a beacon to the desperate souls who seek to escape the cosmic hell in which they are imprisoned.



FLAME SPOUTS OF DESOLAIR

Results of research on the planet Desolair indicate that this world once supported various forms of life in an environment similar to that of Earth. While the remains of the native inhabitants are well-preserved, little has been learned about their culture—though the cause of their extinction is quite obvious. The planet suffers from an unstable tectonic structure, and the stress of its induction into the Maelstrom accelerated the movement of the plates. The surface of Desolair resembles an extreme version of an Earth desert, a wasteland of barren plains and hard-packed dirt stretching as far as the eye can see. The destructive geo-thermal activity continues in a constant cycle of seismic action and volcanic reaction. Violent earthquakes are a common event—and are among the least threatening of the planet's activities.

The most dangerous attribute of Desolair is, naturally, the reason humans visit the inhospitable world. At unpredictable intervals, the planet vomits huge gouts of flame from one of the countless geysers that dot the landscape. In addition to the flame, these geysers vent potent gases that offer a valuable source of energy. With the right equipment, a gas-mining team can cap the geysers in a manner similar to an oil well, drawing the gases off and containing them. Occasionally, something in the planet shifts and some other medium is introduced to the vent's recesses, resulting in a spout of ash or steam rather than gas, which plays havoc with the equipment. Underground flames occasionally ignite a pocket of the gas, and in rare instances a vein of magma may burst up through the vent, destroying the equipment and usually several members of the mining team.

The risks involved in mining the gas are equal to the rewards, because natural resources such as this are rare in the Maelstrom. Union crews mining on Desolair also risk vicious battles with Neo-Soviet work gangs as intent on gaining access to Union equipment as on mining the gases themselves. The superior technological level of the Union gives it an advantage in mining and in protecting its operations.

SPING PODS OF SYNDOR

Most races on planets inducted into the Maelstrom have been forced to search for and develop new sources of energy because their native resources have been heavily depleted, stolen by other races, or contaminated in the inevitable upheaval caused by The Crossing. One of the more sought-after fuel stores is the sping pods that grow on the gigantic world of Syndor. These immense seed pods contain an oil that is an excellent lubricant and can also be easily converted to a high-energy fuel that works in machines created by a

variety of technologies. A mature sping pod stands at an average height of about 4 meters and contains up to 50 liters of sping oil, making a small patch of these pods a veritable goldmine of fuel.

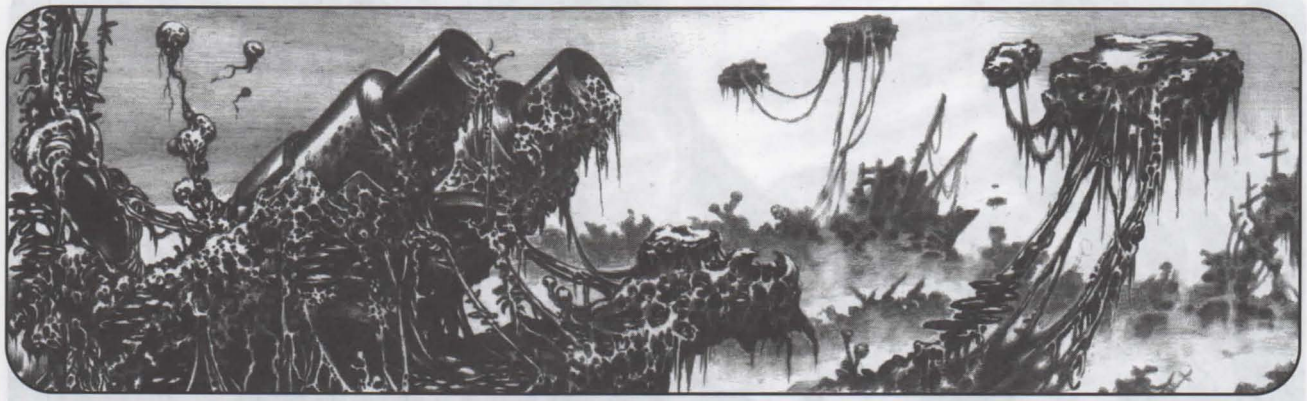
Aside from the competition for the pods from other races, the only danger in harvesting oil from the sping pod is from their seeds. Oil can only be harvested from mature sping pods, and mature pods represent the stage at which the plant propagates. From maturity until death, the sping pod undergoes sporadic contractions, a powerful, violent flexing of the plant's tissue, which project the plant's thorn-tipped seeds in random directions. Tough and resilient, these seeds fire from the sping pods with a velocity comparable to that of a shell from a Pitbull rifle. Furthermore, sping pods mature at different rates, making it difficult to judge when it will be safe to harvest the oil from any given plant or patch. Regardless of whether this random growth cycle represents the natural evolution of the species or a mutation forced on the sping pods by the nature of the Maelstrom, the unpredictability of the pods' maturation cycle adds extra risk to the task of gathering this resource.

Some races avoid the danger posed by the seeds by simply uprooting the entire plant and destroying the pod in the process of extracting the oil. Other races, including humans, recognize the value of the sping pods as a renewable resource and tap the pods, draining out the oil without killing the plant, thus allowing the plant to still drop its seeds.

LIGHTNING PLAINS OF ZIRXX

The atmosphere of the planetoid known as Zirxx is locked in a perpetual state of turmoil. Nowhere on the surface can there be found a region with clear skies. Powerful blasts of lightning and bone-shaking peals of thunder continually ravage the land throughout the small globe. The most striking peculiarity of this storm is the fact the ground beneath it remains completely dry at all times. Despite the tempestuous atmospheric conditions, Zirxx is a desert planetoid; all the water seems to be tied up in the thunderheads that constantly roil through the sky.

All along Zirxx's equatorial region, the land is extremely flat and covered in an ashy powder. The chemical composition of this powder is such that it detonates in an incredible explosion upon contact with water; such an explosion is roughly twelve times more powerful than one created with a similar amount of pure sodium. This property makes the powder a highly desirable commodity to many races in the Maelstrom, either as a weapon or as a potential energy source. No race has established any kind of outpost in this equatorial region, however, because this is the region that is referred to as the Lightning Plains of Zirxx.



The storms over the Lightning Plains are neither more nor less fierce than elsewhere on the Zirxx. In fact, a lightning bolt has not fallen from the sky for many years. The area gets its name from the fact that those exact same lightning bolts that struck here so many years ago are still in place. Crackling columns of electricity dot the landscape, surging between heaven and earth, with not the slightest sign of ever diminishing. The prevalence of the lightning is such that it would be impossible to cross the equatorial region at any point without drawing dangerously close to several of the standing bolts. "Dangerously close" in this case turns out to be several hundred feet; the sizzling pillars tend to shoot out random blasts of electricity into anything that moves within this radius.

Scientists cannot agree whether the powder was created by the perpetual lightning or if it is the powder that has somehow trapped the lightning in a strange feedback loop with the clouds above. Since this is the only place in the Maelstrom where the powder can be found, the two are undeniably related. Unfortunately, all of the races who have the capacity to study this quirk of nature are motivated in less academic directions at this time.

ENERGY PODS OF SABREE

On a planet known to the pharon as Sabree lie the deserted ruins of a civilization whose people are assumed to be extinct. This absent race had apparently mastered a technology that was markedly alien, even by pharon standards. The ancient cities are comprised of immense steel structures entwined by filaments and cords of an organic resinous material. These lines of bio-matter form an intricate, city-spanning network that converges at a central podlike structure, one in every city.

Each central pod remains aglow, even today, with an unknown source of power. It is suspected that these central pods create energy, which is transferred and stored within smaller pods, scattered throughout the city. No one living has discovered a safe way to tap the energy contained within. Several spectacular explosions and other displays of destruction have resulted from various attempts to do so, but the pods remain as inscrutable as ever, even defying attempts to remove them to a more clinical environment. Research teams have scoured the buildings looking for some clue as to the operation of the power source, but the race that once occupied the planet seems to have left no written records of any kind.

Much to the chagrin of the pharons, who seem to believe the race responsible for the pods may have escaped the Maelstrom, the shard have also exhibited a strong interest in the planet. The shard believe that the pod energy sources may assist them in reproducing, and have fought several engagements with pharon exploratory forces.

VERNAX

Vernax is a spheroid mass whose orbit lies quite near the Tangle. Given the nature of Vernax, it is probably safe to hypothesize that it is a life-form (or group of life-forms) of similar construction and purpose. The surface of Vernax is really just a tremendous, horrific weed patch. All manner of plants and fungi grow rampant here, none of them very pretty, most of them quite dangerous. Writhing vines, snapping toothy bulbs and pods that expel ominous clouds of spores all lie in wait for the unlucky visitor. Some of the stalks even grow long enough to reach outside the atmosphere of Vernax to grab spacecraft and small asteroids that venture too near the strange plant world. Since the core of Vernax most likely lacks mineral deposits, space flotsam is an important dietary supplement for the plants that live here.

Since Vernax is so much like the Tangle in composition and location, many believe that it is some sort of offspring of the larger anomaly. Given several eons to feed and acquire mass, Vernax will probably one day grow large enough to be considered a major feature of the Maelstrom as well. Its more aggressive habits might result from its relatively small size; while the Tangle can simply wait around for new material to crash into it (a common occurrence in the Central Ring), the plants of Vernax must reach out and grab whatever they can. What they do reach can be consumed in an astonishing variety of ways, but it is always consumed.

This is not to say that Vernax should be avoided altogether. Much like the Amazon jungle of Earth, the teeming plant life of Vernax is comprised of such a diverse array of species that some of them cannot help but have beneficial uses for any race intrepid enough to attempt their collection. There is a small amount of animal life that thrives on Vernax, so those plants obviously don't eat everything that comes their way . . . .

CREATURES

The following creatures are just a few examples of the diverse and lethal forms of life that can be found throughout the Maelstrom.

COLVIS' EMBRACER

The Colvis' embracer, often referred to as simply the embracer, is a species about which human researchers have been able to obtain frustratingly limited information. This is chiefly due to the beast's ability to avoid live captivity and the odd fact that upon death, the corpse of the embracer desiccates and dries into a chitinous shell that defies any attempt at internal examination.

Appearance

The creature is roughly humanoid in structure, with a sharply angular, bony frame. A grayish, pasty skin appears to be stretched tight over a prominent, sharp-edged skeleton. The embracer has six limbs, all tipped with two to four wickedly curved talons, well suited for disemboweling prey. It moves in a somewhat insectlike gait, alternately bounding and scuttling rapidly on all six legs. Even in rest, the creature always maintains a hunched-over position, staying low to the ground and never rising erect. The beast is vaguely human-sized, but with a much larger head, which houses a very unusual jaw structure. The embracer's head is almost entirely dominated by the two huge vertical jaws which are designed to envelop the head of its prey, while a third, lower jaw delivers a killing blow with the long, vicious spike it bears. The lower jaw hinges outward, projecting the spike into the brain of its victim.

Habits

Because of this particularly specialized attack anatomy, the embracer's attack strategy is fairly predictable. The creature tends to drop from an overhead hiding place, closing the remaining distance to its prey with its quick scuttling run and its prodigious bounding ability. It then uses its long, multi-jointed arms to grapple and pin its opponent so that its head can get into position to deliver the killing blow.

Remains of the embracer's victims indicate that it does not consume more than their brains, which may explain why it kills so often. It will attack without provocation any living creature within its territory, which is demarcated in an extremely odd manner. Both the mouth and foremost arms of the embracer possess orifices that excrete a strange bioresin material that the beast uses to cocoon the remains of its victims. After slaying its prey, the creature transports the body back to its lair and proceeds to cover it in a mucous coating of slimy excretion that rapidly dries into a shell-like material, holding the embracer's trophies in place. Exceptionally large or vicious embracers have been known to have "trophy fields" of up to seventy square meters, dotted sporadically with macabre pillars of twisted skeletal remains. It is unknown whether or not these trophies are some form of mating ritual, but embracers are rare and never encountered in pairs or larger groups. The bizarre bioresin appears to be virtually the same material into which the embracers' bodies dry after death; the resin crumbles at any attempt to cut or break it, rendering dissection problematic, if not impossible.

It is worth noting that the namesake of the embracer, Private Shayne Colvis, was the species' first documented human victim. He disappeared from his squad, but the Union Army trooper's bio-transmitter remained functional, having avoided destruction although implanted in the scalp, which was severely mauled by the beast. When Colvis' squadmates located him, he had already become a permanent part of the embracer's collection, but after dispatching the beast, they painstakingly extracted his corpse from the monument for proper burial.

FANGRAY

This odd-looking creature is widespread throughout the cen-

tral region of the Maelstrom and tends to thrive best in areas dense with vegetation of one type or another.

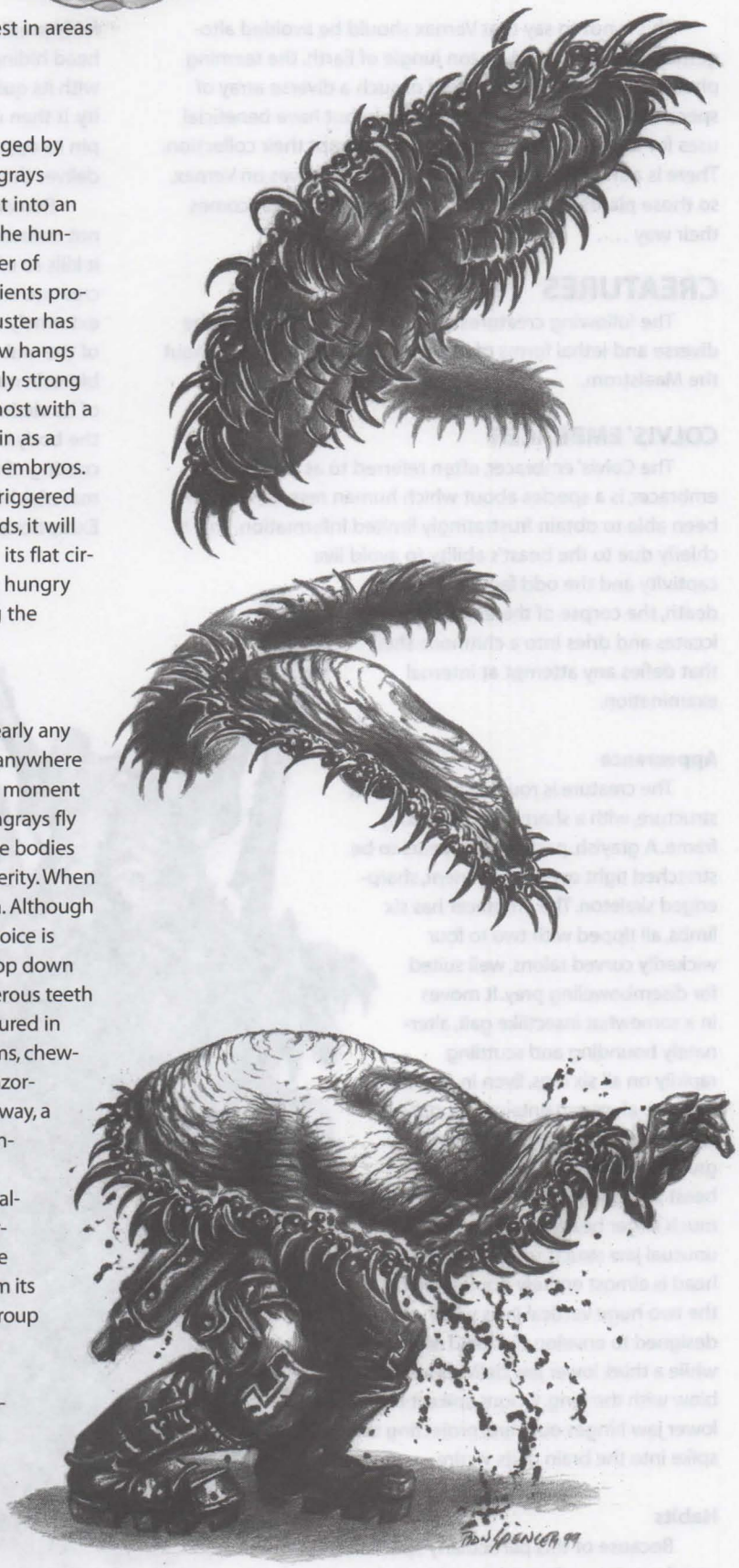
Appearance

The fangray has a disc-shaped body that is ringed by savage fangs and less obvious sensory organs. Fangrays grow from eggs, which are implanted by the parent into an organic host. As the eggs, which can number into the hundreds, develop into maturity, they form into a cluster of round leathery pouches, growing fat from the nutrients provided by the organic host. At this stage, the egg cluster has broken through the surface of the host's skin. It now hangs from the outside, secured on a thick and surprisingly strong umbilical stalk. The stalk is rooted deeply into the host with a webbing of feeding tubes, some of which are as thin as a hair, channeling nutrients to the voracious fangray embryos. In time, the eggs will be ready to hatch, a process triggered by an egg's weight. When an egg is around 8 pounds, it will break from the umbilical stalk and reflexively open its flat circular form, swooping away through the air, already hungry for its first real meal. This meal often ends up being the fangray's unhatched siblings.

Habits

Colonies of fangrays can be found lurking in nearly any area of the Maelstrom, and each colony can harbor anywhere from 50-100 of the creatures. Natural flyers from the moment of birth, fangrays are quite adept while in the air. Fangrays fly by undulating and rolling their flat, extremely flexible bodies to move through the air with extreme skill and dexterity. When fangrays hunt, they do so in groups of up to a dozen. Although they will eat plant matter if need be, their food of choice is fresh meat of any kind. Numerous fangrays will swoop down onto a victim and latch onto its body with the numerous teeth lining the edge of their disc-shaped forms. Once secured in this manner, the fangrays will undulate their flat forms, chewing and grinding their victim apart with the many razor-sharp ridges and teeth on their underbodies. In this way, a group of fangrays can completely consume a human-sized creature in a matter of minutes.

When not hunting for food, the fangray can usually be found perched in a high position such as underneath a high outcropping of rock or the top of a large tree. It hangs upside down by using the teeth that rim its body to hold on tightly to its perch. When at rest, a group of fangrays looks very much like their infant eggsack selves. For this reason, it is extremely dangerous to approach a nesting cluster of fangrays; it is quite difficult to discern the feeding embryos from the full-grown adults. The species has migrated throughout the Maelstrom by implanting eggs into creatures or objects that travel from world to world, allowing the fangray to undertake deep space travel, a feat of which it would otherwise be incapable.



GORGONIAN HIVEBACK

In order for a species to survive, it must form relationships with its environment and other species around it. The Gorgonian hiveback is a perfect example of such a relationship forged in the Maelstrom.

Appearance

The Gorgonian hiveback is a warped descendant of the Gorgonian stalker, once a fierce predator on its homeworld of Gorgon VI. The Gorgonian stalker was a sleek and stealthy hunter. Its size, strength and fighting prowess placed it atop the food chain on its native planet, but when Gorgon VI was drawn into the Maelstrom, the creature mutated, undergoing dramatic physiological changes. Its lean, powerful body grew twisted and malformed. Tumorous growths erupted along its back and shoulders, nearly doubling the creature's mass. Left unchecked, these tumors grow rapidly, robbing the once-potent hunter of the skills necessary to survive. As a result of this terrible metamorphosis, a peculiar symbiotic relationship developed with a small creature native to the Maelstrom, the Gehenna leech.

The Gehenna leech is a small, parasitic creature that feeds off the flesh of a large host. Gehenna leeches live in small clusters or hives and are capable of long-term hibernation. They can live in and adapt to a variety of hosts, and have spread throughout the Maelstrom.

Gehenna leeches are vicious little creatures. They are small, dangerous animals with thick skin and powerful jaws. Their hyperactive metabolism causes them to burn energy nearly as fast as they can consume food to sustain themselves. Thus, they lie dormant until the opportunity to inhabit a large host creature presents itself. Once they have invaded the host, they find the sustenance they need without expending a significant amount of energy acquiring it. Thus the evolutionary bargain struck with the Gorgonian stalker.

Habits

The Gehenna leeches nest in the large tumorous masses on the back of the Gorgonian stalker. They feed on these unnatural growths, satisfying their nutritional needs with a minimal expenditure of energy. Their slow, methodical feeding keeps the tumors at a manageable size, allowing the stalker to retain the mobility it needs to hunt.

Although the stalker is able to hunt, it no longer has the skill necessary to bring down its prey. The leeches, however, do. Once the stalker has tracked its quarry, the leeches launch out of its back. They attack the prey as a group, swarming over it and tearing out gobs of flesh with their sharp, serrated teeth. They work quickly, and once the prey has been subdued and they have eaten their fill, they return to their tumorous hive. The stalker consumes what remains, acquiring the sustenance it needs and adding to the tumorous growth that sustains the Gehenna leeches.

After feeding, the Gorgonian hiveback can often be heard emitting a high-pitched wail, as the painful feeding of the Gehenna leeches resumes.

HYDRANIHL

The hydranihl are a species of flying pack beasts that have been found by human exploratory teams on nine planets to date. The planets they are known to inhabit are near a dead planet that many researchers theorize to be the homeworld of these eel-like monstrosities. The dead planet is named Gobi for two separate reasons. The primary reason is that it features an inhospitable desert-like environment, oppressively hot and dry. The secondary reason is the poisonous atmosphere of the world, as deadly to humans as the real Gobi desert region following the radiation defilement left by the Union/Neo-Soviet conflicts of the late twenty-first century. To understand why researchers would believe that the creatures hail from Gobi, one must first know more about the hydranihl themselves.

Appearance

These serpentine beasts possess a camouflage mechanism much like that of the Earth chameleon, having a skin which changes color and marking patterns to blend with its surroundings. While this camouflage is not nearly good enough to make the hydranihl completely invisible, it almost always gives a hydranihl pack the advantage of surprise. It is theorized that the power is based in psychic emanations or some other sense besides normal vision. Accounts of meetings with these fell creatures tell of different appearances of the animal when viewed from different angles. This has prompted scientists to believe that the hydranihl may be able to present a different appearance on each side facing potential predators or prey, possibly based on some knowledge of what the viewing organism sees. In other words, unlike the crude camouflage of the chameleon, which changes its skin color based on predominant colors in its surroundings, the hydranihl may actually be able to know what each enemy sees and change each part of itself to blend in with its surroundings for multiple opponents. When combined with the uncanny speed and devastating power of a swarm attack, this ability makes the hydranihl one of the more feared denizens of the Maelstrom.

The hydranihl method of locomotion is poorly understood; they have no wings or other appendages, and no visible means of staying aloft. Their long, serpentine bodies give the impression that they slither through the air, and their movements are quicksilver fast, blinding and ferocious with speed.

Habits

Hydranihl typically travel in packs of two to ten creatures, using group efforts to pull down their prey. They seem

to feed only upon moisture, attacking live prey only to drain the fluids from their bodies. This is one reason that Earth scientists have theorized Gobi as their place of origin, since the hydranihl's biological makeup requires fluids for survival, yet none are present in any appreciable amounts on the planet. The existence of hydranihl remains on Gobi in the absence of water causes the scientists to theorize that the planet's induction into the Maelstrom may have caused the its thin crust to fracture, resulting in severe seismic upheaval. This volcanic activity may have both poisoned and dried the environment, providing the catalyst for the hydranihl's migration to other worlds.

SHIFTER

Shifters are one of the most unusual lifeforms in the Maelstrom, and their presence and purpose are a complete mystery.

Appearance

Shifters are massive creatures that exist on several planes of reality simultaneously. The degree to which they exist in any single dimension fluctuates constantly, causing their physical appearance to perpetually shift and change. As a result, portions of a shifter may be completely invisible or have a blurred, unfocused appearance while other parts of the creature may be seen with crystal clarity.

Every shifter seems to look different. This may be an illusion. Since it is impossible to see an entire shifter at once, it is impossible to tell what these gargantuan creatures actually look like in their entirety. Some shifters seem to have a multitude of eye-like organs spread over their surface; others, a pattern of feelers and pulsating flesh. Most are horrible to behold, although they occasionally appear in stunningly beautiful configurations, with light pouring out of every orifice and iridescent colors playing over their bodies in a spectacular fashion. The ever-changing, fluctuating form of a shifter may materialize out of thin air or emerge from the ground beneath one's feet, unrecognizable appendages grasping at nothing.

Habits

The unique, multi-dimensional nature of shifters creates an instability in the space surrounding them, causing it to warp and shift. This strange side effect of a shifter's presence can be extremely disconcerting for living beings in the immediate vicinity, causing reactions ranging from nausea to insanity. In rare instances, an individual struck by a weapon while in the unstable space generated by a shifter may be pulled apart as the destructive force of the weapon combines with the warping of space to spread the individual's atoms across a dozen realities.

The actual volume of space warped or changed by a shifter's presence changes constantly as the shifter's presence in a dimension increases or decreases. The spatial instability may affect a radius as small as several feet or extend outward as far as 100 yards. Human researchers who have studied this phenomenon theorize that shifters may be able to control and manipulate the space-time distortion that surrounds them, although no concrete proof of this theory exists.

Shifters seemingly pay little attention to the events surrounding them or the impact their presence has on those events. Their huge forms drift through the Maelstrom, occasionally intersecting with planets or asteroids, at other times simply floating through space, constantly shifting in a strange, mockery of all that is sane. Their presence is dangerous, as a materializing shifter can cause considerable damage to ships and vehicles, as well as to life-forms.

SLEEPER

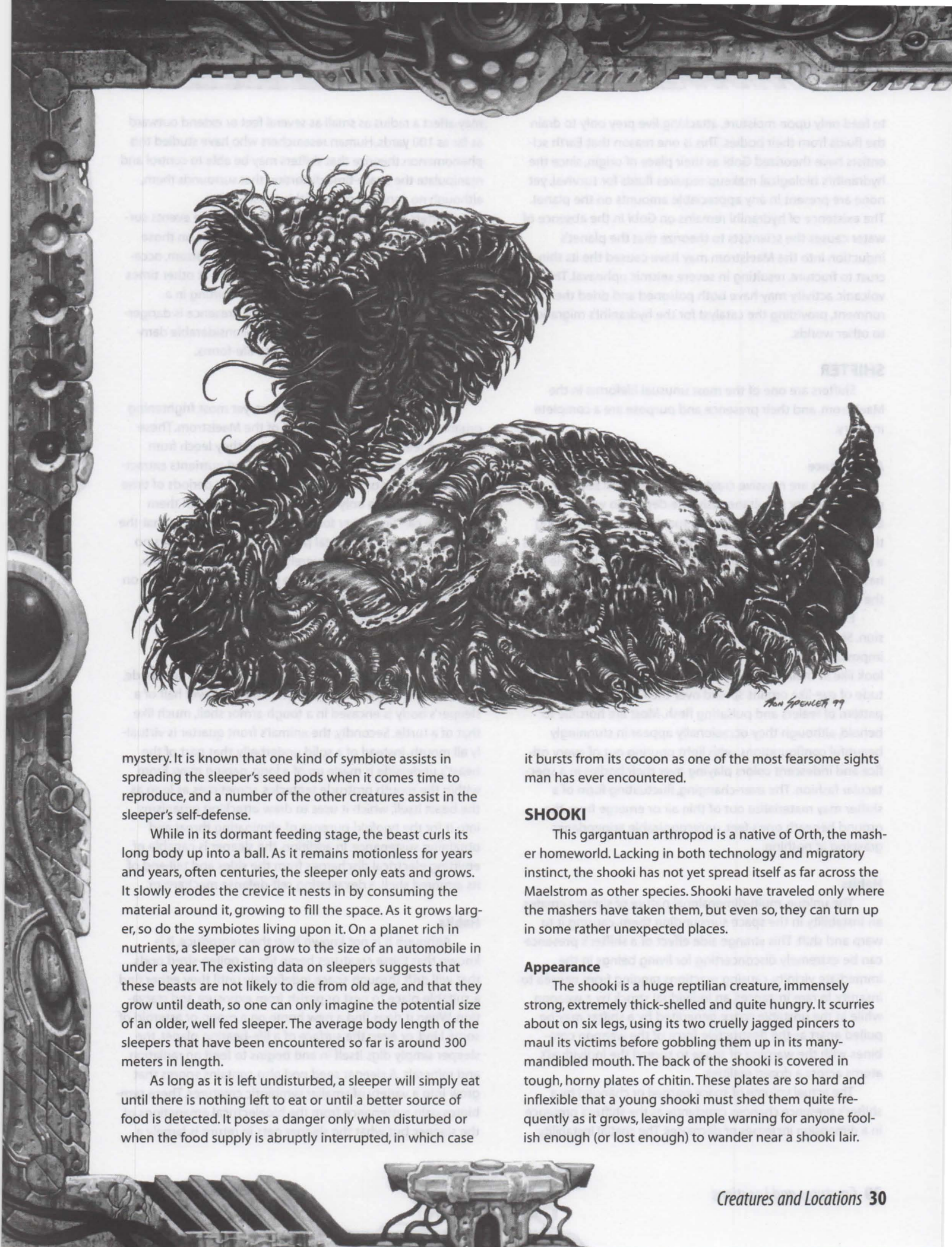
The sleeper is one of the simplest, yet most frightening organisms living within the chaos of the Maelstrom. These creatures feed off of radiant energy that they leech from their environments, as well as minerals and nutrients extracted from their nests. They can survive for long periods of time in deep space, with only stellar radiation to sustain them until they can find other food sources. It would seem that the sleeper serves no ecological purpose of any kind, forms no link in any food chain, but merely exists to feed and grow. This often changes if the creature makes a home for itself on a living planet, however. Sleepers have been sighted on a wide variety of worlds throughout the Maelstrom.

Appearance

The sleeper roughly resembles an enormous centipede, with some important differences. Firstly, the lower half of a sleeper's body is encased in a tough armor shell, much like that of a turtle. Secondly, the animal's front quarter is virtually all mouth. Instead of a solid underbelly, that part of the beast's underside is made up of a long, gaping maw. From within the mouth protrude tentacles, sometimes as long as the beast itself, which it uses to draw attacking organisms into it for the twofold purpose of eliminating threat and obtaining sustenance. In addition, the sleeper is capable of emitting electrical discharges from the sides and tail-end of its armored shell, a devastating self-defense mechanism.

Habits

Although it is not known how they reproduce, it is known that these creatures begin life as pollen-sized pods that will drift through space indefinitely until they either find a suitable place to nest or perish from exposure and starvation. When it does find a new home on a moon or asteroid of some kind, or even the surface of a life-bearing planet, the sleeper simply digs itself in and begins to feed on radiation and minerals. A sleeper seed pod also contains spores that grow into a variety of smaller symbiotic creatures. These symbiotes gain sustenance from the bioelectrical emanations of the sleeper, but what the sleeper gets in return is largely a



mystery. It is known that one kind of symbiote assists in spreading the sleeper's seed pods when it comes time to reproduce, and a number of the other creatures assist in the sleeper's self-defense.

While in its dormant feeding stage, the beast curls its long body up into a ball. As it remains motionless for years and years, often centuries, the sleeper only eats and grows. It slowly erodes the crevice it nests in by consuming the material around it, growing to fill the space. As it grows larger, so do the symbiotes living upon it. On a planet rich in nutrients, a sleeper can grow to the size of an automobile in under a year. The existing data on sleepers suggests that these beasts are not likely to die from old age, and that they grow until death, so one can only imagine the potential size of an older, well fed sleeper. The average body length of the sleepers that have been encountered so far is around 300 meters in length.

As long as it is left undisturbed, a sleeper will simply eat until there is nothing left to eat or until a better source of food is detected. It poses a danger only when disturbed or when the food supply is abruptly interrupted, in which case it bursts from its cocoon as one of the most fearsome sights man has ever encountered.

SHOOKI

This gargantuan arthropod is a native of Orth, the masher homeworld. Lacking in both technology and migratory instinct, the shooki has not yet spread itself as far across the Maelstrom as other species. Shooki have traveled only where the mashers have taken them, but even so, they can turn up in some rather unexpected places.

Appearance

The shooki is a huge reptilian creature, immensely strong, extremely thick-shelled and quite hungry. It scurries about on six legs, using its two cruelly jagged pincers to maul its victims before gobbling them up in its many-mandibled mouth. The back of the shooki is covered in tough, horny plates of chitin. These plates are so hard and inflexible that a young shooki must shed them quite frequently as it grows, leaving ample warning for anyone foolish enough (or lost enough) to wander near a shooki lair.

Habits

Before the masher homeworld was drawn into the Maelstrom, masher children often kept shooki as pets (hence the innocuous-sounding name of the species). At that time, shooki were only the size of small dogs, and completely herbivorous. Since the nightmare of the Maelstrom began, however, many of these creatures have grown to immense proportions and developed a taste for flesh. These mutated shooki seem to prefer masher flesh, but they will not turn down other flavors of fresh meat if they get the chance to try them.

Oddly enough, the mashers do not seem to realize that the larger, predatory shooki come from the same genetic stock as their pets; small, unmutated shooki are as popular as ever among masher children. For this reason, nearly every newly established masher colony brings with it the potential for a predatory surprise since any given litter of pet-shooki offspring might contain one or more of the monstrous variety. The monster-shooki invariably run away from home before they grow very large, so the mashers have yet to make the connection between monster and pet. The gigantic shooki are hunted and exterminated by the mashers at every opportunity.

Fortunately, most of the shooki's natural intelligence and predatory instincts were bred out of the species long before the induction; shooki are all quite stupid. They even lack some of the most basic capacities for self-preservation. When seeking food, a shooki will completely fixate on its chosen prey, even to the point of ignoring attacks made against it from other quarters. It will do everything in its power to grab and eat the morsel it has selected, only giving up when that prey manages to get out of its range of vision.

Shooki can be encountered singly or in small groups. They lack the intelligence to work together toward any sort of shared goal, yet they seem to enjoy the company of their own species. They strenuously resist any attempt to tame, train, or domesticate them, preferring instead to eat their would-be masters at the first opportunity.

CREATURE RULES

The following rules allow you to incorporate the creatures described in this chapter into your games of VOR.

COLVIS' EMBRACER

At the beginning of the game, all players roll D10. The player with the highest result places a marker on the playing area (at least 12 inches from the edge) to represent an embracer nest. At the end of each turn in which one or more non-vehicle models is within 12 inches of the embracer nest, randomly choose one of those models and roll D10.

1–5 No effect.

6–10 Attack! The model is attacked by the embracer.

That model's player rolls D10 and adds the attacked model's Close Combat to the result. A total of 12 or more means the model fights off the embracer and play continues as normal; next turn, choose another random target (within 12 inches) and roll for the embracer again. On a total less than 12, remove the model as a casualty. If the die roll result is 10 (before adding the CC stat), the model has killed the embracer and it has no further effect on play this game.

FANGRAY

At the beginning of the game, all players roll D10. The player with the highest result places a marker on the playing area (at least 10 inches from the edge) to represent a fangray nest. At the end of a turn in which one or more models is within 10 inches of the nest, roll D10 for each model.

1–4 No effect.

5–8 Attack. The model must make an Armor Test to avoid 1 point of damage from the attacking fangrays.

9–10 Gory death! The model is devoured in seconds by a swarm of hungry fangrays. Remove the model from play and treat it as a casualty.

GORGONIAN HIVEBACK

Place a marker representing the Gorgonian hiveback in the center of the playing area at the start of the game. At the end of each turn, roll D10 and move the hiveback a number of inches equal to the result toward the closest model within 12 inches of the creature. The hiveback moves a minimum of 5 inches, and always moves along the shortest path to its destination. The hiveback cannot enter or climb over any terrain. If there are no models within 12 inches of the hiveback, use the scatter rules to determine a random direction for its movement.

If the hiveback comes within 2 inches of any model during its movement, that model is attacked by the vicious Gehenna leeches that inhabit the beast's tumorous back. The model must make a successful Armor Test with a modifier of –2 to avoid being removed from the game as a casualty. The hiveback has the following statistics, and need not make Brains, Guts or Morale Tests. Melee attacks against it automatically succeed, except on a roll of 1. [**MP**: D10 (min. 5 inches), **BOD:** 6, **LIF**: 5, **AR**: 5]

HYDRANIHL

Place a marker representing the hydranihl swarm in the center of the playing area at the start of the game. The swarm will move at the beginning and the end of each turn. Each time the swarm moves, use the scatter rules to determine the direction, then roll 2D10 and move the swarm a number of inches equal to the result. If the swarm moves off the edge of the playing area, then it has no further effect on the game. Treat the swarm as a flyer for purposes of crossing terrain and obstacles. The swarm attacks any model it flies over; the model must make a successful Body Test (no Armor Test allowed) to avoid taking 1 damage. The swarm is immune to attacks from models.

SHIFTER

Place a marker representing the shifter in the center of the playing area at the start of the game. At the start of each turn, move the shifter twice using the scatter rules. Treat the shifter as a flyer for purposes of crossing terrain and obstacles. Shifters cannot be harmed in combat. When the shifter has moved, roll D10 to determine its effect on the game.

1–3 Time Distortion. Any models within 6 inches of the shifter are caught in a time distortion that slows them down. Affected models may use only half their MP this turn (round up). Modify Ranged or Close Combat (whichever is appropriate) by +2 for attacks against affected models.

4–7 Reality Flux. Any models within 6 inches of the shifter are exposed to multiple dimensions simultaneously and are severely disoriented. Affected models may not move or act this turn. Affected models also may not be attacked; they aren't entirely corporeal during this experience, and the shots pass harmlessly through them.

8–10 Gravity Distortion. Roll D10 for each model within 6 inches of the shifter. On a result of 1–5, they cannot move this turn and any attacks they make cost double the MP. On a result of 6–10, they may move up to 6 inches at no cost in MP during their turn, and all attacks cost –1 MP (minimum of 1 MP).

SLEEPER

You didn't really expect us to give you stats for a sleeper, did you?

SHOOKI

At the beginning of the game, place a marker representing the shooki in the center of the playing area. Randomly determine a model as the target of the shooki. The creature will pursue this target until the model is killed, at which point a new target is randomly determined. The player whose model is not the target of the shooki moves the creature during his turn along with his other models. The player must move the shooki toward its target by the shortest possible route each turn. The shooki has the following stats. [**MP**: 12, **CC**: 6, **RC**: 2, **POW**: 5, **BOD**: 6, **BRN**: 2, **GUT**: 6, **LIF**: 4, **AR**: 5, **SIZE**: L]

FORCES

THE UNION

The leaders of the North American Union like to portray themselves as the first and last line of defense for the common man on Earth. In the turbulent times since the Earth was sucked into the Maelstrom, there has been an abundance of danger and enemy forces to use as an excuse for a massive military build-up and increased social controls. Given the threat posed by the Neo-Soviets and alien marauders, most of the populace has eagerly surrendered personal liberties for the safety promised by military might.

HISTORY

In a not-so distant future, two forces dominate the Earth, with most nations casting their lot in with one faction or the other. In the East, the savage iron fist of the Neo-Soviets brutalizes and dominates all of Asia in its single-minded quest to absorb the Earth itself. In the West, a tense and panicked North American Union has rapidly pursued a path of extensive military build-up, engaging its rival in a bitter Cold War and seizing every excuse to engage in military police actions and expand its sphere of influence.

Before the entire world was forced to choose one side or the other, there was relative peace on Earth for nearly a century. The United States of America, at the head of NATO, had ruthlessly enforced world stability so that it could exploit its position of dominance in world markets, elevating its affluence and standard of living far above other nations. Whenever national conflicts threatened to break out, a U.S.-led NATO peacekeeping force would descend upon the situation, keeping it firmly contained so as not to disrupt the business of the United States and its allies.

This situation changed with the arrival of Gregori Vanivar in the political environment of the devastated Russian Republic. Within a matter of months, Vanivar unleashed his neo-Stalinist agenda and turned a struggling agricultural nation into an industrial giant whose idea of world peace was to eradicate the existence of other nations. One country, no wars, the now-General theorized.

Naturally, the goals of the United States conflicted with Vanivar's changes, and both countries quickly returned to old patterns of low-intensity conflict, disrupting each other's global operations and engaging in spying, sabotage and media attacks whenever possible. The other nations on Earth noted these developments, and quietly began stepping up their military development budgets in anticipation of what was to come.

Sixteen months after the Russian Republic officially became the Neo-Soviet Empire, the United States' first orbital defense station was completed. The American government was quite aware that the main advantage they possessed over the Soviets was their level of technological advancement. The Soviets, through sponsorship of countless coups and revolutionary conflicts, had depleted their own resources nearly as fast as they could produce them. Though their military was strong, it was based on brute strength. The Americans knew that they had the tools on their side, and intended to use those tools to every advantage. Billions of dollars were pumped into warfare research and development as the Americans sought to perfect their military training programs, improve the performance of their weapons and field armor, and produce new weapons of war to give them an edge over the Soviets. The American intelligence and propaganda program also swung fully into action, dredging up old tried-and-true dirty techniques.

A year and a half after the orbital station was activated, both superpowers continued their build-ups. The dam broke when the United States addressed the NATO Council with the news that the Soviet government had not only permitted, but actually sponsored and funded, biological and chemical warfare research. Despite claims that the data may have been faulty or even completely manufactured, the NATO council, spearheaded by the Americans, called for a full halt to these activities and submission to a NATO investigation to ensure that all research in these fields had halted. The Soviets never even issued a reply.

From that point on, relations between the two camps degenerated into open hostility. After a border skirmish between the Soviets and Chinese turned into a nuclear conflict, the United States exerted its influence and coerced the governments of Canada and Mexico to merge with the U.S. and establish a new entity called the North American Union, now commonly referred to as the Union. Based on the United States' system of government, the new Union regime also implemented increased military and war powers, more severe criminal punishments and conscription for all citizens.

Tensions escalated, and war seemed imminent, when a higher power intervened—the Maelstrom. The change wreaked untold destruction upon the Earth. The battle station Liberty, one of three Union orbital platforms, was torn from the sky. With the Union's advanced missile defenses in chaos, the Neo-Soviets seized their chance and launched a limited nuclear strike. Two major cities, Seattle and Detroit, were annihilated in the exchange, erasing not only countless lives but also a valuable port city and a huge industrial center. This act marked but the beginning of an intense and bloody conflict between the two nations.

DOMAIN

Within the Maelstrom, the Earth is currently spiraling through the Outer Ring. The Union and Neo-Soviets have both begun exploring the space around their planet, sending out forays toward promising planets or interesting anomalies. As a whole, however, the Union's presence within the Maelstrom remains limited.

The North American Union is far and away the most intact nation remaining on Earth, despite the ravages of the

Change and nuclear war. Seattle and Detroit are nuclear wastelands, with many other dense urban areas severely damaged. The Union has embarked upon a titanic reconstruction effort, sinking vast resources into rebuilding the nation's salvageable cities. Those that were beyond repair were hastily evacuated and abandoned; the Union has plans to reclaim these areas in time, but they are swiftly becoming home to populations of predators, mutants and other societal outcasts.

Remarkably, the Union was not thrown back half a century in development as many other nations were, a testament to its technological achievements and prewar preparations. However, even the Union is feeling the resource crunch, as its limited supplies are dwindling in order to fuel the reconstruction while simultaneously engaging in a draining war. The government has begun to pass strict laws concerning conservation and mandatory "community service" in order to keep rein on the situation.

With borders completely surrounded by water and the most technologically advanced military the world has ever seen, the Union is even more defensible than the United States was before it. Faced with the Neo-Soviet threat and shrinking resources, the Union leadership has started to take an active interest in its Central and South American neighbors. Their chaotic state makes these lands a prime target for infiltration by Neo-Soviet influence or even troops, and it may not be long before the Union exercises its "manifest destiny" and lays claim to the entire Western hemisphere.

CULTURE

Built on the foundation of the United States, with added wealth and manpower from the coffers of its northern and southern neighbors, the Union is the most developed and innovative nation on Earth. Despite this, it is still a nation plagued by inequalities, as martial interests consume the bulk of its efforts. Under the control of an entrenched bureaucracy that is little more than a puppet for military and industrial powers, the majority of citizens lead lives that are privileged in comparison to other nations. But their freedoms and privacy are quickly disintegrating, eroded by life under de facto martial law. Curfews, resource limitations, tedious productivity standards and relentless patriotic propaganda have turned everyday life into a banal exercise.

Meanwhile, a forgotten underclass grows explosively in the cracks, hiding from urban patrols and pervasive surveillance measures. Confined to cordoned-off urban ruins for the most part and

deterred by harsh anti-crime laws, these pockets occasionally spark large civil disturbances.

The Union's government-backed corporations continue to achieve new technological developments, selling their patents to the government in trade for hefty profits, eased trade restrictions and military protection. As these scientific breakthroughs inevitably find their way into the peerless military science branch of the Union war machine, the Union Army boasts a level of technology second only to the wicked, archaic devices of the mysterious pharon.

The goals of the Union at this point in time are threefold. First, they seek to rebuild the damage done to their nation during the Change, both the damage done by the Maelstrom itself and that done by the Neo-Soviets. Second, they are dedicated to destroying the threat posed by the Neo-Soviets by toppling them from their position as a military superpower. To this end, all Union citizens of proper age are required to undergo extensive advanced military training and serve a minimum period in the Union armed forces. Finally, the Union seeks to determine and influence the future of Earth and its population within the Maelstrom, looking for information on the nature of the anomaly in which they are prisoners and seeking a way out if one exists.

WAYS OF WAR

The most prominent characteristic of the Union military is its uniformity. The troops are extremely well and identically equipped, always clothed and armed with high-quality gear appropriate for the environment to which they are dispatched. Certain elements persist throughout the Union forces: superb organization, top-of-the-line arms and tech toys, and good health. The Union Army is perhaps the best maintained fighting force the world has ever seen, with survival rates higher than those of any army in human history.

Union military actions tend to rely heavily on their obvious strengths: tactical organization and technological superiority. Using a vast array of data collected beforehand, a Union general will have a solid battle plan and three contingency plans, not to mention one emergency fallback, all formulated before his men are deployed. The troops are thoroughly briefed and, above all, trained for battle. In the field, their maneuvers are orderly and efficient; no needless risks are taken and no losses are deemed acceptable. It is not unusual to see a group of Union soldiers continuously falling back through rows of trenches to avoid casualties, all the while whittling their enemies down until the numbers are in the Union's favor. The resulting counterstrike is usually extremely one-sided.

Another favored tactic involves the Union forces making a highly visible display of ground troops on the battlefield to lure out their opponents. Once the bait is taken, the advance forces quickly take shelter and call down the fury of an orbital artillery strike, moving in afterwards to sweep up the shattered remains of their opponents' forces. These maneuvers often implement the fearsome armored assault suits, a combination of body armor and tank armament. These dreadful, powerful war engines, piloted by a single person, are capable of wiping out entire squads of Neo-Soviet vanguard troops.

Overall, it is the combination of superior tools and knowledge of the most efficient ways to use them that makes the Union army one of the Maelstrom's most respected fighting forces.

THE NEO-SOVIETS

The Neo-Soviet Empire is one of the two major superpowers left on Earth since its induction into the Maelstrom. Under the control of an effective military dictatorship, the Neo-Soviet nation is consumed by war. As its leadership pursues a depraved policy of expansion through whatever means necessary, churning out troops to seize military objectives, the Soviet homeland suffers through nuclear devastation and lack of critical resources. It is an ugly period for the Soviet people, as they are forced to choose between starvation and hard labor in a land poisoned by industry and war, or else enslavement to the Neo-Soviet war machine.

HISTORY

The failure of communism in Russia in the twentieth century was followed by a succession of doomed political structures and experiments in the twenty-first century, all of which failed to take root and pull Russia from its morass of poverty and collapsing social institutions. As new plans and leaders began to fall with increasing frequency, the times became harder and leaner, and the Soviet people began to look for a radical change.

Abruptly, a leader emerged on the political scene who dedicated himself to bringing order back to the Russian people. An army general groomed for command, Gregori Vanivar realized that the real strength of the Russian people had always been military might. A student of Stalin's brand of communism, Vanivar used his military influence to topple his opposition and seize firm control of the Soviet state. He quickly spearheaded a campaign to transform Soviet society into a proto-fascist military state, eager to obtain a new level of prosperity despite opposition from the United States and NATO allies. Reclaiming state control of industry, the country's factories were given a complete overhaul and fired up for escalated production.

Under the general's command, the Neo-Soviet swept with idealistic fury through central Asia, and in three short years the nation was again the size that the USSR had been at the apex of its strength. The Russian core was strengthened by the reacquisition of the previously adjoined nations to the west as far as Poland and to the south as far as the Chinese and Afghanistan borders.

At that time, the only political force on Earth that rivaled the military power of the Soviets was the United States of America. What the U.S. lacked in population, they made up for in technological strength. Years of civil wars and coups had left the Soviets well-associated with warfare, but without the most efficient tools of the trade. To counter these shortcomings, Vanivar ordered an expansion of military experimentation into fields previously considered taboo, such as genetic and chemical warfare, and an evolution of their nuclear capabilities to a more strategic role. The Americans, who for years had pursued similar research of their own on a limited scale, were well aware of the Soviet's efforts thanks to considerable intelligence operations. Releasing their information to the world political community, the United States called for a halt to all Soviet chemical and biological war efforts under penalty of harsh political sanctions by NATO nations. The Soviets refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of what was effectively a U.S. puppet force, and ignored the American and NATO demands. For an entire year and a half the situation simmered without change, until China made a large-scale mistake.

Wary of the Soviet build-up on their doorstep, the Chinese government mobilized their border forces to guard against acts of aggression. In response, the Neo-Soviets increased their presence along the Chinese border. Two opposing military forces in such close quarters naturally produce tension, and this case was no exception. A small skirmish erupted in which some small arms fire was exchanged, but no

casualties were suffered. Each government blamed the other for the incident and called for the other's border troops to stand down immediately. Both factions refused to relax their guard, and attempted diplomatic intervention by neighboring states only fueled the crisis. Inevitably, another skirmish erupted, this much more gruesome than the first. It quickly escalated into a full-blown battle commanded by inexperienced leaders on both sides.

The conflict went from bad to worse when the Neo-Soviets broke through the Chinese line and drove deep into their territory in an attempt to cut off supplies and reinforcements. In the heat of invasion, a panicking Chinese commander ordered the use of a small tactical neutron missile on a Neo-Soviet staging area. The Soviets almost immediately ceased fighting and pulled back completely from the border. Four hours later, the Chinese military base closest to the Russian border, as well as a ten-mile radius of the surrounding landscape, was blanketed with a salvo of a dozen Soviet nukes, turning the region to dust and irradiating water supplies and crop fields for the next century.

Following this limited exchange, both sides pulled back to lick their wounds. Other nations were appalled by the carnage and began strict sanctions against both the Neo-Soviets and China. After witnessing this unequaled act of reckless aggression, Canada and Mexico merged with the United States for mutual protection, forming the entity now known as the North American Union. This allowed the American military presence at the nearest Soviet border, in Alaska, to be better reinforced, as effective supply lines directly from Canada were established.

The Neo-Soviet response was to seize the offensive. Led by the nationalist ravings of General Vanivar, the Neo-Soviet Council decided that steps should be taken immediately to consolidate Neo-Soviet borders. The Neo-Soviets launched an unprovoked assault on Mongolia, quickly and easily penetrating her meager border defenses. Within one short week, before China and the Union could overcome their years-old differences and organize any military cooperation, the Neo-Soviets had completely absorbed Mongolia.

In one of the last speeches he would ever intentionally broadcast worldwide, the maniacal Vanivar stated that the acquisition of Mongolia was only a beginning for the new nation. He revealed his intention that his country would eventually encompass the world.

The next three years bore witness to the most nerve-wracking cold war in the history of modern warfare. The armament build-up of both superpowers escalated at exponential rates, far exceeding the mutually-assured destruction

benchmark, until the amount of ordnance that even one of the nations possessed could theoretically crack the earth's crust if deployed in a single strike. As Union military scientists developed the most high-tech, sophisticated military equipment ever used by humankind, the Neo-Soviets dove into dirtier but easier fields of research: manipulating DNA, conducting radiation testing and resurrecting the brutal power of chemical warfare.

The situation came to a head when the Union detected a mass movement of Soviet troops through Neo-Soviet territory toward the Western Soviet border. It appeared that the Neo-Soviet nation was about to make another move on one of her neighbors, a move that the Union was not about to allow. They, along with their NATO allies, mobilized their own forces in preparation for a serious conflict. Not blind to their enemies' movements, the Neo-Soviets realized that they were about to meet resistance, and Vanivar issued his first communication to the outside world in more than three years. In a short, nonnegotiable statement, he informed the assembled NATO nations that if they attempted to interfere in Soviet actions, there would most definitely be a war unlike any the world had seen. He ordered them to have their assembled forces stand down and disperse; the Union silently refused. Both militaries remained at a standstill, each awaiting the other's decision. A force stronger than either of the superpowers broke the deadlock. Earth was taken by the Maelstrom.

With both factions devastated by the Change, Vanivar saw his opportunity as the technological playing field was leveled by the chaos. He ordered a limited nuclear strike against the Union, who responded with nukes and orbital bombardment. This engagement has plunged the Earth into messy and brutal war, threatening the entire planet with destruction.

DOMAIN

The Neo-Soviet Empire now encompasses the vast majority of the Asian continent, as far west as Poland and as far south as Pakistan. This domain, like much of the Earth, is scarred and devastated by both war and the Maelstrom. With many resources plundered and the environment badly polluted by Vanivar's industrialization efforts, basic survival necessities are becoming scarce, forcing drastic conservation and resource-management actions by Neo-Soviet troops. A number of cities were shredded during the change, only to be further hammered by Union nuclear missiles and orbital strikes. The Neo-Soviet Empire is vast, but it is a poverty-stricken wasteland, with little hope of recovery.

Given this crisis, Vanivar has continued to pursue his expansion plans, hoping that his Neo-Soviet troops can absorb enough land and resources to sustain his nation and keep it from collapsing. With the superior Union military bearing down on their arch-rivals, the Neo-Soviets can only hope to develop enough stability to face this threat.

CULTURE

The Neo-Soviet hard-liners call their country a communist nation, but this is far from the truth. While many aspects of the country are modeled after the era of Stalin's reign over the USSR, the Neo-Soviets are more accurately described as a national socialist system. All industry, services, health care and all other vital businesses are owned by the state. In truth, the military is the one supreme power throughout the nation. While Neo-Soviet doctrine states that the people are to each be given a share of the wealth produced by their labor, most Neo-Soviet citizens toil away in their professions with little reward. Many are in fact, nothing more than peasants and serfs.

The peasants comprise what is by far the largest sector of Neo-Soviet society. The average Neo-Soviet citizen is devastatingly poor, the government's continuous war effort having devoured most of the nation's resources. The workers and farmers are given just enough of the basic necessities to keep them alive and working. Their only choice in life is whether to continue to fuel the military industries, or to help maintain the army's nearly endless supply of expendable troops. Often, these peasants will volunteer for military duty simply to receive the benefit of three hot meals a day and a warm bed to themselves. Many of them, especially if weak or sickly, are allocated directly into the rad squads to serve as cannon fodder; these absorb a great deal of enemy fire before the real soldiers join the action. The average peasant is thin, with a hollow look in his eyes, and is dressed in cheap clothes that have been mended numerous times.

Neo-Soviet peasants outnumber soldiers three to one, yet three-fourths of the nation's resources go to the military. Therefore, soldiers are somewhat healthier than peasants simply because they receive better food and health care. Even so, they do not approach the physical standards of the Union army. Neo-Soviet soldiers are usually thin, but wiry and tough, as only a small number of them survive their first active mission. Many are mentally unstable, their psyches having cracked from the brutal abuse they receive at the hands of the officers. Such bloodthirsty psychopaths are usually promoted into the vanguard. The remainder, who are simply fighting to survive, act somewhat schizophrenic; proud and boastful, bullying and arrogant among subordinates, yet cowed and fearful, obedient and attentive in the presence of superiors.

WAYS OF WAR

Wise enough to realize that they were nowhere near the Union military scientists in technological advancement, the Soviet miltech development teams decided to pursue a lateral route. Abandoning pursuits into new technology for the most part, the Neo-Soviets delved into already exposed fields that had been previously unexplored—unexplored for good reason. The two main branches of Soviet military

research from that point on became the Chemical and Radiation Division, and the Genetic and Biological Research Division. Soon, the Soviets were experimenting with the potentially deadly effects of radiation and toxic chemical combinations. Even more horribly, they conducted indiscriminate DNA research—many prisoners of war and criminals have found that the Neo-Soviets have much worse things in store for them than a long jail sentence. Their appearance, their humanity, even their lives may be forfeit.

The Neo-Soviet battle strategy can be described in one word: brutality. The standard light infantry and rad squads are always deployed in the forward ranks, cannon fodder to allow the heavy assault troops, mutants, and chem units to maneuver into place. Casualties among these units average nearly 90 percent. While the enemy tries to punch through the field of bodies that makes up a Soviet front line, the Draco rocket launchers and heavy machine guns thin their numbers and demoralize their troops until they reach close range. There, they are confronted with the horrors of the Puker and Cyclops mutants, and the universally dreaded chem sprayers, all inhumane tools of war that terrify and destroy with equal efficiency.

The overall summary of this tactical style is that the inexpensive, inadequately trained basic troops are considered acceptable losses; they protect and give a better tactical advantage to the expensive, hard-hitting troops that comprise their rear guard. The upside for the Neo-Soviets is that even if they lose a battle, they are sure to affect the psyche of their opponent, battling a successful psychological war as well as the physical. The down-side is that the only way they can keep up the pace of their aggressive military strategy will be to continue to conquer enough territory to replenish their supply of expendable troops. Their strategy has been frighteningly successful so far, but the supply of peasant recruits is not infinite. If Vanivar is to realize his dream of world domination, he cannot afford even the slightest hiatus in his expansionist efforts. The Neo-Soviets must now conquer the world or die trying.

Since the Kommanders routinely sacrifice entire squads in suicide missions, a constant supply of fresh recruits is crucial in order to maintain the size of the army. Thanks to the tremendous shortages imposed on the rest of the population, the Neo-Soviet army is one of the most fearsome fighting forces in the Maelstrom. In order to survive their first mission, however, the Soviet troops must quickly become tough, savage, and battle-smart. The result is a vanguard composed of the cream of the Neo-Soviet crop, all veterans who have survived a nightmarish trial by fire. Furthermore, the military research department's foray into previously forbidden fields such as genetic research and chemical warfare gives them every possible advantage to make up for their lack of advanced technology. Grotesque mutants and squads of soldiers carrying chemical weapons now accompany Soviet troops into battle, ensuring that they spread destruction and terror in equal measure.

THE GROWLERS

Towering monsters of teeth, claws and muscle, growlers are adaptable to any climate and able to consume and digest nearly any substance. They are the ultimate survivors. Their massive size and ferocious temperament make them excellently adapted for the chaotic existence within the Maelstrom. To confront a growler face to face is to know true fear, and to witness the destructive capabilities of a pack of growlers is to gain only deeper respect for their power. Though it is certainly intimidating to battle even a solitary specimen, the threat posed by multiple growlers is overwhelming. Normally combative even among themselves, growler groups perform tasks with coordinated effort, functioning with a subconscious cohesion created through a primal telepathic link known as the packmind.

APPEARANCE

A full-grown adult male growler is typically 10 feet tall, weighs several tons and looks like the bastard offspring of a mountain gorilla and a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Though humanoid, their arms are each longer than the creature's height. These overmuscled beasts have fists bigger than their heads, with strong, claw-tipped fingers curling from heavy, bony knuckles. Along their spines is a row of lethal horn-like spurs, running from the oversized cranial spike at the forehead to the base of the stubby tail. This bulk is balanced on clawed feet that, though small, are very powerful when used as a weapon. Growlers' thick hides come in many colors and textures, typically exhibiting shades of red or blue and sporting variable amounts of hair along the extremities. With their beady, sunken eyes and a jaw dominated by a bear-trap of razor-sharp teeth, growlers face the world with a nightmare grin.

Depending on their primary food source and environment, one growler pack may look and act very different from another. Consuming different substances can cause changes in coloring, behavior and even biological chemistry within the group. The phrase "you are what you eat" is literally true when it comes to the growler. For example, individuals that consume highly metallic elements often develop attributes such as metallic spikes, teeth or claws—even the creature's bones may be composed of a type of metal alloy. Once a pack discovers a food with a particularly beneficial side effect, they will stake out their territory and protect this dietary source jealously, soon raising litters of pups that exhibit similar traits or even stronger characteristics. Within the ever-shifting environs of the Maelstrom, new mutations within the species are certain to arise, but most growlers maintain standard physical traits and fall within one of four main breeds.

RAZORBACKS

Razorbacks are the most widespread breed of growler, and are without question the most savagely brutal. Razorbacks are so named due to their steel-like bone structure and glimmering metallic spikes. Typically found with hides in various shades of red, the breed manifests a wild variety of patterns and textures.

BLUEFANGS

Bluefang growlers are the closest that the species comes to being "grazers." Heavier and slower than other breeds, Bluefangs spend the majority of the day eating and sleeping. Due to overconsumption, they often display smaller legs, longer arms and large swollen bellies. They use their massive girths to their advantage, tending to be stronger than other breeds and using their size to pin down their opponents down. Bluefang coloring tends toward shades of blue with wildly colorful patterns.

WHITETUSKS

Whitetusk growlers are named for their predominant oversized tusks. The massive, stark-white tusks of mature specimens can grow to 3 or 4 feet if unbroken, and are formidable weapons in battle. Whitetusks tend to have a moderate amount of body hair along the shoulders, back and forearms, and consider themselves the protectors of the growler race.

FIREGUTS

Firegut growlers have developed a unique furnacelike biology, featuring a thermal (rather than chemical) digestive system. Fireguts have bumpy cracked hides, with steam plume vents in place of ordinary spikes down their backs. These plumes help regulate the extreme heat of their bodies and release the noxious fumes produced by their effectively volcanic digestive system. Members of the breed can projectile-belch blasts of flame as well as concentrations of sulfurous saliva and deadly hot digestive material.

HISTORY

The growler homeworld of Primordia, a massive and lush jungle planet fully six times the size of Earth, was drawn into the Maelstrom shortly after the pharons and shard. Soon after arriving, Primordia was rapidly drawn dangerously close to the Central Ring and underwent a prolonged bombardment as it crashed through a massive asteroid field. Thousands of meteor strikes abused the planet, choking the atmosphere with debris from the impacts.

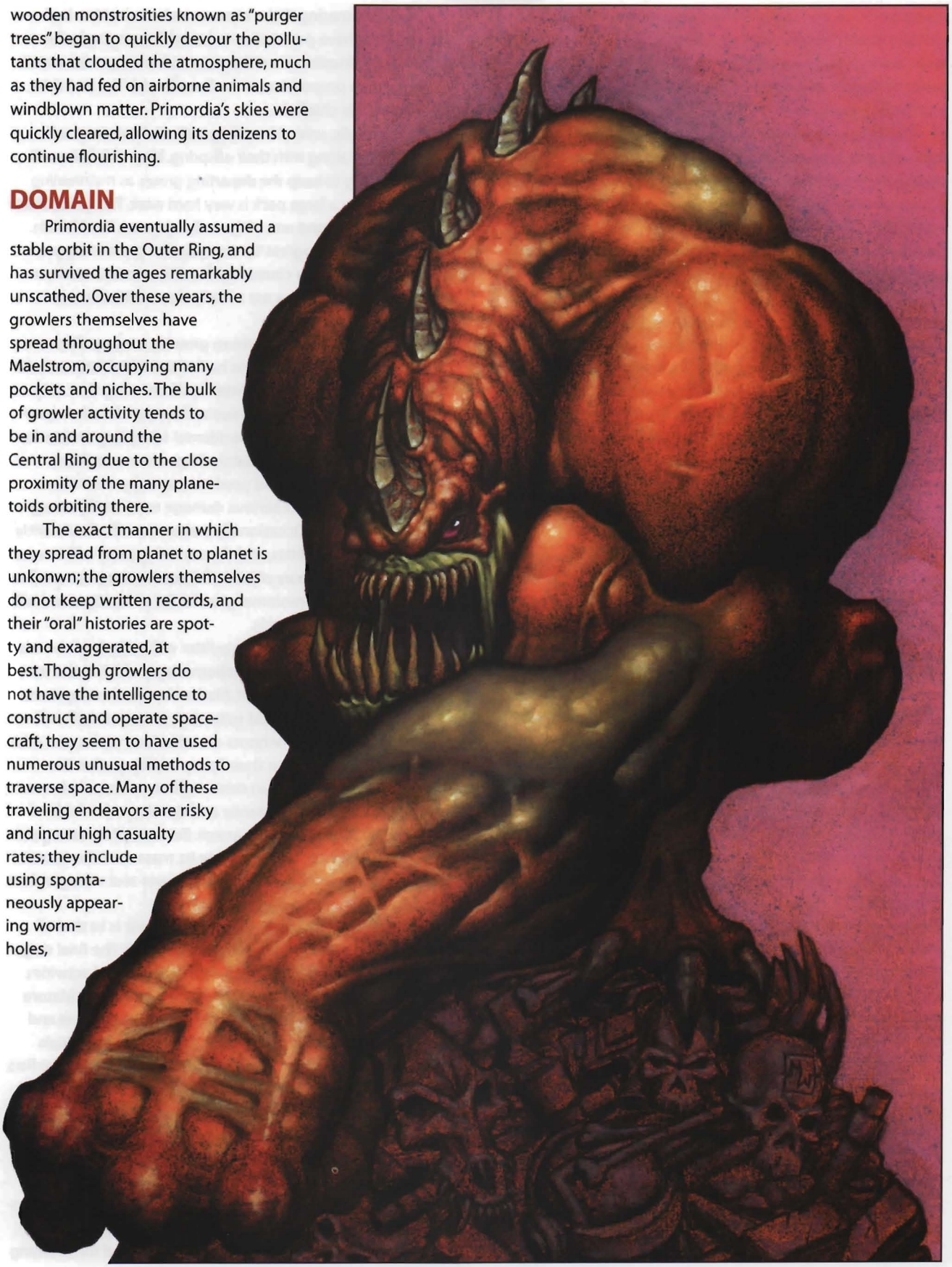
For a lengthy period, the life-forms of Primordia seemed doomed. But the products of Primordia's competitive and harsh ecosystem were feral and gigantic; over ages of evolution, only the strongest and most adaptable species had thrived in the planet's hostile environment, and they did not surrender to this turn of events. As if to exemplify the ravenous nature of the planet's beasts, a species of towering

wooden monstrosities known as "purger trees" began to quickly devour the pollutants that clouded the atmosphere, much as they had fed on airborne animals and windblown matter. Primordia's skies were quickly cleared, allowing its denizens to continue flourishing.

DOMAIN

Primordia eventually assumed a stable orbit in the Outer Ring, and has survived the ages remarkably unscathed. Over these years, the growlers themselves have spread throughout the Maelstrom, occupying many pockets and niches. The bulk of growler activity tends to be in and around the Central Ring due to the close proximity of the many planetoids orbiting there.

The exact manner in which they spread from planet to planet is unkonwn; the growlers themselves do not keep written records, and their "oral" histories are spotty and exaggerated, at best. Though growlers do not have the intelligence to construct and operate spacecraft, they seem to have used numerous unusual methods to traverse space. Many of these traveling endeavors are risky and incur high casualty rates; they include using spontaneously appearing wormholes,



riding asteroids and spaceborne creatures and stowing aboard vessels visiting Primordia. It is not known if such expansionist migration is intelligently directed or the result of instinct and accident. It matters little—growlers are a spreading menace.

Packs have been deliberately brought to other worlds for study, and have escaped their confinement to develop their own new territories; there is one such new pack of growlers within the desolate landscape of Earth's Siberia region. Growlers seem to thrive in habitats ranging from arid deserts to frigid arctic areas, and have demonstrated remarkable adaptability to limited food sources and extremes in temperature and climate. Certain breeds naturally tend to seek particular areas to inhabit, but there seems to be no locale in which the growler will not thrive. For example, Firegut growlers tend to prefer hot, volcanic regions but are entirely comfortable in a snow-covered region due to their internal heat source. There have even been some reports of growlers surviving for days without oxygen, as well as of amphibious growlers who have developed gills and feed upon unsuspecting swimmers.

CULTURE

As a race, the growlers have no real technology. The use of rudimentary tools such as stones and branches has been noted, but weaponry is limited to their formidable physical forms.

Growler verbal expression is limited to short barks, grunts and roars. They tend to rely on interaction at a subconscious level by tapping into the packmind for direction. This packmind is controlled by the most powerful member of the pack, known as the chieftain. This hulking beast controls the eating patterns of his clan, decides the location of a given encampment and directs the others in battle. These commands are delivered by force of will, compelling the pack members into action through simple visceral suggestion and the adjustment of a member's comfort level. When following the will of the packmind, a growler will feel a natural pull toward a given task. If it strays from that task, it feels an uncomfortable sensation of revulsion until it redirects its efforts toward the goals of the packmind. It is by these means that a given pack is able to function cohesively. If a chieftain falls in battle, the remainder of the pack may erupt into a berserk fury. When this occurs, growlers go out of control, slaughtering anything in their path, including fellow pack members.

Although leadership of the growler pack is male dominated, all members of a given pack will engage and participate in battle. The females of the species are as ill-tempered as the males, and are ferociously protective of their young. The female, or "momma," of the growler species is extremely dangerous because she may launch a frenzied attack without provocation. Even the growler chieftain will not often approach a momma. Instead, it is usually the momma that initiates mating. If she chooses to breed with a bull that does not have permission to breed, it puts the bull in a very difficult situation. He either spurns her advances, which is a dangerous proposition, or he breeds with her and risks the wrath of his chieftain.

Occasionally, several breeding bulls and mommas will leave the pack, along with their offspring. Most chieftains will not risk fighting to keep the departing group, as maintaining dominance over a large pack is very hard work. The group then forms a new pack, and one of the bulls becomes its chieftain.

All growlers progress through similar growth stages, despite the variations caused by food source and environment. All of these stages are usually represented in any given pack.

The first phase, the newborn growler, is a pup. Pups are born in very large litters; about half of the initial litter will die from cannibalism within the litter itself, ensuring that only the strongest and most ferocious will survive. Another quarter of the pups will die from accidental trampling or attacks by opposing packs and predators. Pups are immediately capable of self-defense and predatory activity, their horns and teeth able to inflict serious damage even while emerging from the womb. Occasionally a momma will die violently while delivering her litter, and the surviving pups will devour the carcass within hours of birth. Otherwise, the pups tend to remain close to the "momma" growler for protection, and will rarely attack independently.

Less than 25 percent of any litter will make it to the next phase of development, the onehorn stage, which is the transition between pup and adult. Marked by the development of a large protruding cranial spike that serves as their main fighting weapon, the onehorns are voracious eaters and add large amounts of mass to their frame in preparation for adulthood. Their increase in consumption causes onehorns to take on a plump appearance and develop thick folds of skin that act as resilient hide armor. Because of its eating patterns, a onehorn will nearly double its mass over the course of only three months. Onehorns are slower and stronger than pups, but faster and weaker than bulls.

The next phase of growler development is to that of mature adult, a bull or momma. This is usually the final stage of growth due to the control of eating habits and activities maintained by the chieftain through the packmind. Mature bulls and mommas are surprisingly quick for their size and are capable of awesome levels of destruction. Individuals have been known to smash through solid rock with bare fists in search of food, or even peel away chunks of a spacecraft's metal hull with their powerful jaws.

A select few bulls attain the role of chieftain. Chieftains are usually covered with scars from battles with other bulls for pack leadership. When a bull is successful in removing a chieftain, he assumes control of that pack. This is an extremely difficult task to accomplish, since a chieftain possesses superior size and strength as well as insight and forewarning

of impending attack through the packmind. Sometimes circumstances allow a bull to become a chieftain without fighting the old chieftain for dominance, but even so, few bulls live to become chieftains. A chieftain has an even greater body mass than the largest bull, and has an advanced physiology that allows them to use abilities that are not available to the rest of the pack. One of these abilities is the higher brain development that allows a chieftain to tap into and control the packmind.

WAYS OF WAR

When confronted with an enemy threat, growlers do not hesitate to act aggressively. Growlers attack individually or as a group, usually in defense of territory, but occasionally as part of a hunting party. The species is built to eat and fight, and excels at both tasks. Growlers tend to group with their own breed but will occasionally team up with other breeds in order to confront a particularly dangerous or massive enemy force. There is the threat of conflict between different breeds, but a mixture of breeds in a growler army is an awesome force to confront.

The packmind is almost always used when the pack is confronted by major opposition. The need for a cohesive assault is crucial to any army's success and the bond of the packmind is stronger than any relayed verbal orders ever could be. The obvious strength and ferocity of an individual growler is enough to inspire fear and dread in the most battle-seasoned soldier, but to witness the assault of a single mind made up of several bodies is even more overwhelming. As a group, the pack instinctively knows when it is being flanked and will instantly shift focus to compensate. In an ambush, the group can remain silent and motionless until prompted by a push in the packmind, at which point an abrupt assault can be launched with incredible stealth.

Growlers use an array of fighting techniques in close combat, aided by their surprising mobility. A growler can lope forward with frightening speed by planting its knuckles into the ground ahead and pulling the rest of its body forward in great lunging thrusts. It can also move less quickly on its undersized legs, raising its enormous arms into the air and appearing to instantly double in size. Growlers have even been seen curling themselves into a ball and impaling an enemy on their spines as they roll forward. When not in hand-to-hand combat, growlers can employ other means to disrupt an enemy. A mature bull can blast a fearsome roar of such force that it can actually knock an enemy off his feet. Another technique, normally used to clean debris from the teeth and throat after eating, is to cough up a short, explosive burst of air. This launches the dislodged debris in a shotgunlike blast toward an enemy. Additionally, by raising upright and slamming its massive fists onto the ground, a growler can create a shock wave powerful enough to topple enemies. Regardless of their tactics or numbers, growlers are always a deadly and violently explosive force to be reckoned with.

THE ZYKHEE

The zykhee represent the remainder of an incredibly advanced race of tall, thin humanoids that nearly destroyed themselves with their abuse and misuse of technology. They have since become a spiritually enlightened, highly disciplined warrior race, using their advanced understanding of science to aid rather than enslave their culture. Relying on a strict code of conduct and a rigid caste system, this androgynous race maintains a brooding, monk-like outlook on life. Though there exist different settlements of zykhee within the Maelstrom, they all share the same beliefs and attitudes. Focused exclusively on the preservation and protection of their people, the zykhee have developed a structured society consisting of mystics and warriors whose ornate fighting techniques are beautifully savage to behold.

APPEARANCE

The average adult zykhee is 7 to 8 feet tall, with long, thin limbs, a high, sloping forehead, and two elbows on each arm. The entire torso has a "stretched" look to it, and the fluid movement of its gangly frame lends an almost hypnotic quality to a zykhee's appearance. Zykhee skin tones vary from shades of blue to gray or maroon, depending upon the coloring of the ancestors.

Warriors of the race wear different forms of elaborate armor for combat, some for protection, others to be used as offensive weaponry.

DEATH DANCERS

Many members of the warrior caste are honored with ceremonial body tattooing. Covered from head to toe with these twisty, winding tattoos, some warriors, known as "death dancers," have the capability of causing the tattoos to actually move and writhe beneath the surface of the skin. This produces a mesmeric quality to their movements during battle, which serves to distract and disorient an opponent. Some death dancers have developed the capability of using their tattoo magic to induce a violent case of nausea and vertigo in an opponent. Others have learned to emit a phosphorescent flaring from the colorful tattoos, which leaves a lasting imprint on an adversary's retina, effectively blinding him.

HUNTERS

Another specialist within the warrior class is the hunter. Only the strongest and most physically capable among zykhee warriors may become hunters; usually, hunters tower over otherwise tall zykhee. To allow anything less would be a disservice to the race, as well as to the proud warrior caste. They do not make use of any mystical enhancements, relying instead on superior physical ability and the finest in weapon technology. Hunters are entrusted with carrying out any physically daunting tasks which might arise within a settlement, such as killing large creatures which threaten the area, ousting a stray pack of growlers, or other, similar missions for which their training and expertise would be of service to the race.

STALKERS

The stalkers are a specialist group of warriors that use stealth and higher-than-average fighting prowess to bring down opponents in the fastest way possible. Stalkers are masters of assassination, rarely even glimpsed by their victims. Using magical glyphs on their weapons and armor, they have the ability to warp and control the darkness in order to aid them on their missions. This is accomplished through the aid of the mystics, who have charged the stalkers' equipment with powerful mystical energies. When the stalkers do allow an enemy to see them, the sight is often terrifying and intimidating, to say the least. Wearing heavily engraved ornate plating and armor, the stalkers' trademark is an evil-looking, leering mask, which they always don before engaging in battle.

MYSTICS

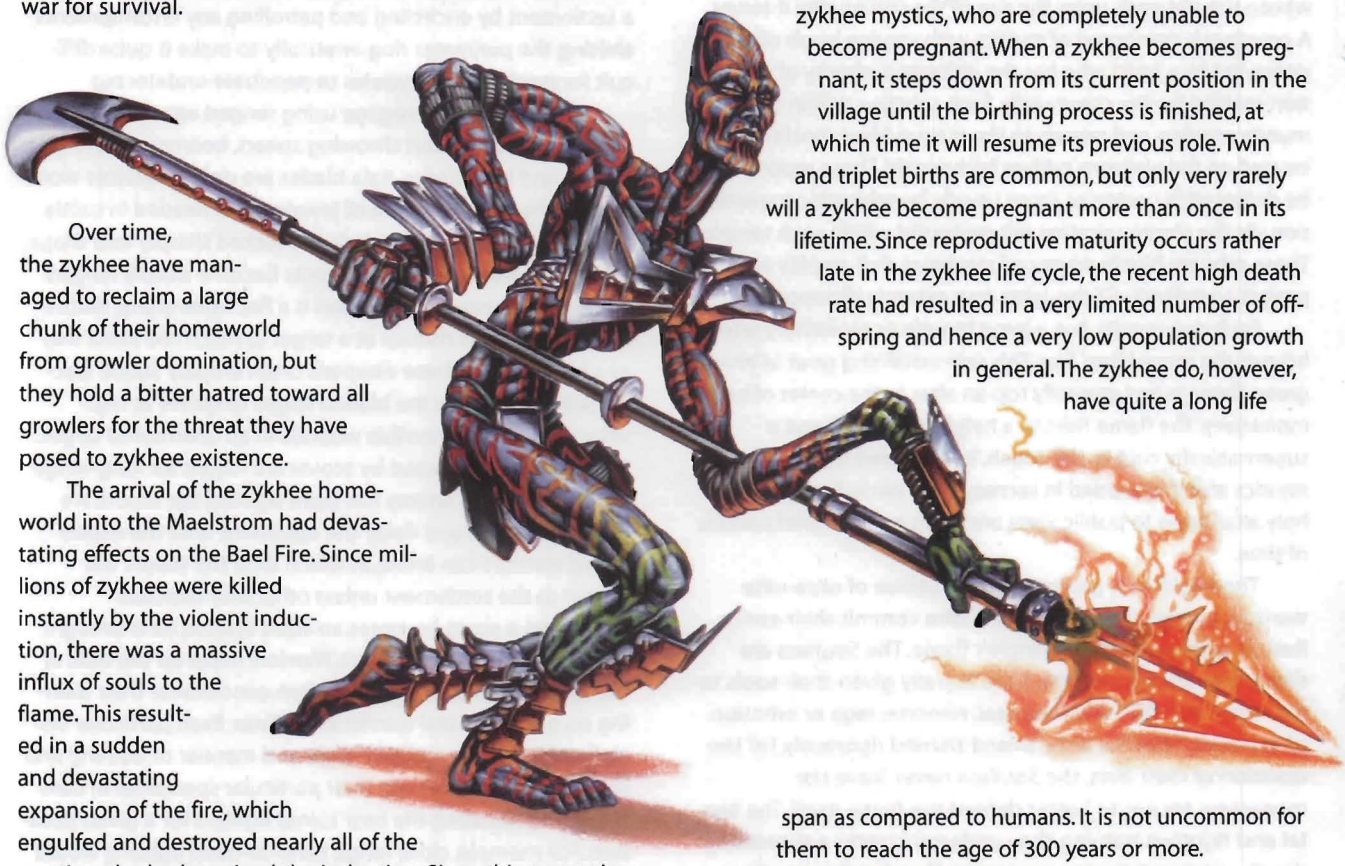
The mystics are the ruling force within the zykhee culture. Mystics are dark and mysterious, isolated from the remainder of the populace during most of their lives. They are devoted to the study and worship of sacred powers harbored within their temples and monasteries. Mystics never mingle with the rest of zykhee society and thus have a sinister reputation among the commoners; this reputation is greatly enhanced by their appearance. Each mystic has an aura of darkness surrounding his body. The mystic's aura is more an absence of light and color than a presence of darkness. Shadows seem to stretch toward the mystic as he passes, and light is dulled and absorbed into the aura, giving the mystic a dim, shrouded appearance. This inky aura is useful as a defensive tool in combat, yet it poses no hindrance to the mystic's own performance, being his natural environment. This aura becomes more powerful and pronounced as the mystic progresses in his training and study.

HISTORY

At the peak of zykhee scientific development, the warrior caste dominated zykhee society, while the mystics were relegated to the role of advisors at best, dangerous cranks at worst. The zykhee came to rely heavily on their technology for all things. As with other societies where science has evolved faster than enlightenment, much of this technology was turned toward warfare. Their civilization was becoming increasingly unstable and wracked with conflict, when a widespread equipment malfunction nearly crippled their way of life. This event shocked many zykhee and forced them to rethink their society's direction. The mystics stepped forward at this point, and the zykhee saw that they had been wrong to dismiss the insight of the mystics before.

A radical shift in their way of life was undertaken at the consensus of zykhee society, placing mystics in the role of leading the zykhee down a new path. Their race's addiction to technology was abandoned in favor of spiritual advancement. The sacred Bael Fire became the pillar of the zykhee community. The Bael Fire, or Soul-Flame, is the physical manifestation of the zykhee soul, actually containing the spirits of the zykhee ancestors.

This new era of zykhee enlightenment was only beginning when their world was seized by the Maelstrom. As the zykhee homeworld was pulled through the Veil, it was fused together with another planet—one of the first growler colonies. With little warning, the zykhee civilization was suddenly phased together with a planet full of vicious, carnivorous beasts. Much of their homeworld was twisted and hideously transformed, and as a society the zykhee found themselves engaged in a desperate, close-quarters war for survival.



Over time, the zykhee have managed to reclaim a large chunk of their homeworld from growler domination, but they hold a bitter hatred toward all growlers for the threat they have posed to zykhee existence.

The arrival of the zykhee homeworld into the Maelstrom had devastating effects on the Bael Fire. Since millions of zykhee were killed instantly by the violent induction, there was a massive influx of souls to the flame. This resulted in a sudden and devastating expansion of the fire, which engulfed and destroyed nearly all of the mystics who had survived the induction. Since this event, the flame has taken on a more sinister, malevolent feel. This "tainting of the flame" has been kept a guarded secret among the inner circle of mystics, who continue to search for a remedy to the corruption of their precious treasure. There exists, however, a smaller faction within the mystic brotherhood who has other plans. This secret group has a wicked agenda for the future of their order and for the zykhee race as a whole.

DOMAIN

The warped zykhee homeworld remains in orbit in the Outer Ring. The zykhee, realizing they may not win back full control of their planet, acted swiftly to establish other options. Over the years, the zykhee have spread throughout the Maelstrom, establishing at least a dozen strong colonies. Most zykhee settlements exist within the Outer Ring, which the zykhee view as the safest region of the Maelstrom. They rarely travel within the Inner Ring, and they seek to avoid proximity to growler habitats, except when they specifically seek out growlers in hopes of exterminating them.

CULTURE

There are no males or females within the zykhee race; nearly every member of society has the physical capability of spontaneously producing offspring upon reaching a certain level of physical maturity. The exceptions are the zykhee mystics, who are completely unable to become pregnant. When a zykhee becomes pregnant, it steps down from its current position in the village until the birthing process is finished, at which time it will resume its previous role. Twin and triplet births are common, but only very rarely will a zykhee become pregnant more than once in its lifetime. Since reproductive maturity occurs rather late in the zykhee life cycle, the recent high death rate had resulted in a very limited number of offspring and hence a very low population growth in general. The zykhee do, however, have quite a long life span as compared to humans. It is not uncommon for them to reach the age of 300 years or more.

A zykhee's place in society is preordained from birth. Limitations are placed on a newborn according to the child's arrival in the ancient "timeweave." The timeweave is an artistic plotting of events throughout the zykhee's carefully recorded history. This plotting creates a cyclical pattern that the society uses in spiritual ways to guide their lives. Cycles, and the eternal pattern of rings, are common themes within zykhee culture. This manifests itself artistically in both aesthetic design and weaponry, as well as architecturally

throughout the structure of buildings and temples. By adhering to the imposed vow of duty as ordained by the timeweave, it is believed that atonement can be made for past transgressions and misfortunes. If a newborn arrives at a time of past misfortune, a vow of servitude to society is imposed in the hopes of preventing bad things from happening in the future. It is believed that strengthening and tightening the fabric of the timeweave will, ideally, lead to a perfect society.

About half of the population are commoners, and the other half take on the duties of warriors and mystics. Those not absorbed into the ranks of the military focus on the building of structures, generation of food, and the maintenance of local communities. Every member of zykhee society is born into a purposeful existence. Each member serves a crucial role in the balance and success of the society.

Each zykhee community is ruled by a conclave of mystics whose size depends upon the size of the community it serves. A conclave is composed of mystics with varying levels of experience, led by a head who has the ultimate authority of decision-making for the community. Each conclave within a community answers and reports to the main zykhee conclave located on the war-torn zykhee homeworld. These reports can be delivered in person or, more usually, by telepathic transmission via the communication orb protected within each temple. These orbs are highly advanced machines that amplify and project an individual's thoughts over extreme distances.

Each community has a large temple or monastery which houses the sacred Bael Fire. This self-sustaining gout of blue-green flame burns eternally top an altar in the center of each monastery. The flame rises to a height of six feet and is supernaturally cold to the touch. It is a sacred icon for the mystics and is shrouded in secrecy. Only periodically is this holy altar open to public view, and then only for brief periods of time.

The Bael Fire is protected by a retinue of ultra-elite warriors known as the "Soulless," who commit their entire lives to safekeeping the temple's flame. The Soulless are silent, hooded figures who have literally given their souls to the flame and thus show no fear, remorse, rage or emotion of any kind. Selected at birth and trained rigorously for the duration of their lives, the Soulless never leave the monastery except to better defend the flame itself. The brutal and rigorous training they undergo creates a supremely deadly warrior; it is not uncommon for a Soulless to die during the training process. The mystical ceremony used to transform a warrior into one of the Soulless leaves the inductee's body covered in raised scar-glyphs. This scarring is an integral result of the process which rends the soul from the body of the zykhee in exchange for his chillingly awesome powers. Once entrusted with the duties of temple guardian, each Soulless receives a sacred staff which burns at both ends with an extension of the Bael Fire.

WAYS OF WAR

The zykhee have a very structured, very disciplined military force. Trained extensively in each of their given specialties, these warriors present a fierce opposition when organized into squads or armies. Each community has at least one warrior shrine within its fold. All members of the zykhee community are trained to fight, but only those preordained as warriors receive the intensive training found within the walls of the shrine. Those who are trained as specialty warriors (death dancers, stalkers, and Soulless) receive half of their training from established warrior trainers and the others within the walls of the mystic temples. It is during these secret training sessions in the temples that the specialist warriors receive their mystical gifts and powers.

The adolescent members of the warrior class fulfill the role of scout while striving to earn a place in the ranks of the elite. These scouts serve an essential role in the protection of a settlement by encircling and patrolling any encampments, shifting the perimeter ring erratically to make it quite difficult for predators or enemies to penetrate undetected.

Scouts primarily engage using ranged attacks and use such weapons as short throwing spears, boomerangs, ring blades, and kala blades. Kala blades are unique devices worn around the neck as a form of jewelry until needed in battle. When removed from the neck and flicked sharply into shape, these harmless-looking ornaments become deadly ranged weapons. The resulting weapon is a flat, razor-sharp, discus-like device that is thrown at a target in much the same way as a boomerang. These weapons often employ subtle electronics which cause the bladed edges to quiver at high velocities, causing horrible wounds in an unarmored target. All of the weapons used by scouts are meant for long-range fighting. Once an enemy has been sighted, the scouts are taught to harass and delay the opponent until the experienced warriors can arrive, at which time the scouts will retreat to the settlement unless otherwise directed.

When a scout becomes an adult zykhee, he is brought into the ranks of the warriors. Warriors make up the bulk of the zykhee fighting force and often concentrate their training on one of several warrior disciplines. Each particular discipline focuses on a certain style and manner of training and fighting. The warriors use their particular specialties in combat by coordinating the best suited fighters for a given situation. For example, close range hand-to-hand fighting would be carried out mainly by the death dancers, who revel in the thrill of melee combat. Stalkers, on the other hand, would be sent in once the scouts had gathered relevant information about key individuals within an enemy troop. Masters of stealth, stalkers move close to enemy lines undetected and strike with surgical precision using such weapons as the tandem jok-tai. These twin weapons resemble a wickedly curved version of a jet-black pickax. Empowered with deadly mystical glyphs, the jok-tai are so thoroughly permeated with pure

darkness that when they pierce the flesh of a limb, it is frozen and rendered useless for several days (sometimes permanently). When mystics are called upon to engage in battle, they employ a number of attacks using the power of the Bael Fire, including directed blasts of the eerie blue-green flame, conjured walls of flame known as a Wall of Souls, defensive orbs of protection and directed layers of warm, healing soulfire for mending wounded comrades.

The most prized of all zykhee weapons is the Vikoon staff. "Vikoon" is the zykhee word for eternal, or unbreakable, and reflects the resiliency of these amazingly complex weapons. When a zykhee reaches a certain level of maturity and has exhibited a worthy degree of discipline and honor, he is presented with his own Vikoon staff. Resembling a long, well-crafted shaft of metal, the Vikoon staff is actually the pinnacle of technological perfection. Forged with strong alloys and bathed in powerful mystic energies, such a staff hardens to a nearly impervious state. Such is the symmetry and quality of this weapon that it may be balanced on a fingertip with very little effort, even with an average length of 6 to 9 feet. Often modified throughout the life of a warrior, the staff can be altered with a variety of battle tips and blades, or even fitted with double heads. This weapon is such an integral part of the warrior's self that it never leaves the warrior's side. The staff becomes an extension of the physical body and moves almost of its own volition during the heat of battle. All zykhee move in a very fluid manner when in combat, and with Vikoon staffs twirling and thrusting, the fluid, serpentine motions of a warrior resemble a finely choreographed dance of death. Those who have been caught unsuspecting often find themselves quickly missing limbs as they pause to admire the graceful routine.

THE SHARD

The shard are a race eternally insulted. Once they were infinitely free; having evolved into beings of pure energy, they were the most sophisticated race in the universe. They were free of the concerns of the flesh, having forsaken hunger, sleep and even death, and they had trained their minds to manipulate the crystalline material that made up their homeworld. When the Maelstrom devoured the shard planet, however, the tremendous thirst of the Maw began to tear at their loosely bound energy matrices, the patterns of life-force that comprised their souls. Nearly half of the shard perished, their very essences sucked into the Maw. The rest survived by anchoring themselves in bodies they formed for themselves from the very crystal that made up their shattered world. Since that time, the shard have followed a single goal: escape. Using their intricate control of their husks to form physical weapons and channeling small amounts of their own essence into awesomely powerful energy weapons, they perpetually battle throughout the Maelstrom in search of ways to free themselves from their imprisonment. To the shard, there is no greater indignity than being forced once again to wear material bodies, and until that curse is lifted from them, their obsession will not be satisfied.

APPEARANCE

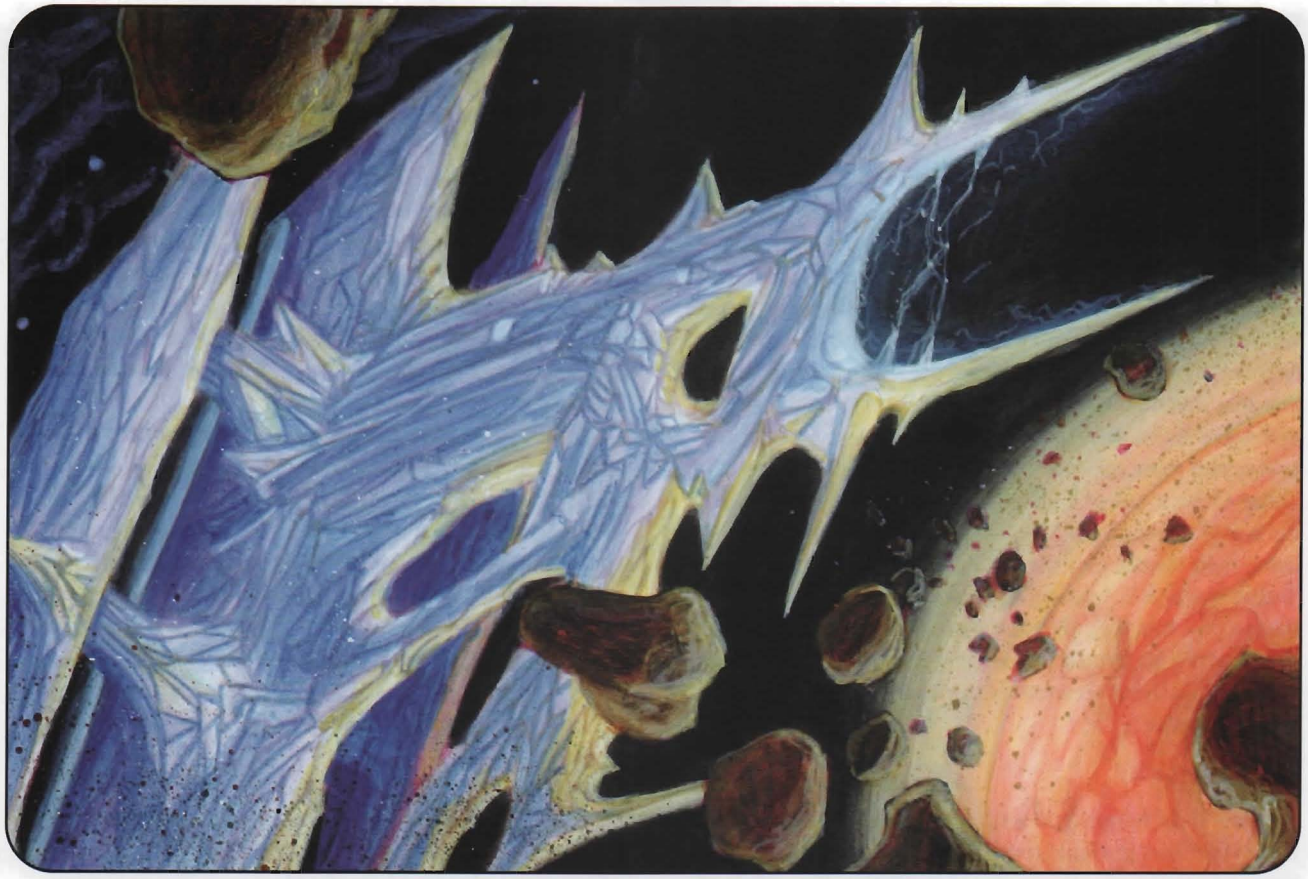
The shard now live in bodies composed of nanite crystal. Most have the ability to exercise fine control of their husks, making their forms as natural as a flesh body. They assume humanoid forms, not out of admiration or mimicry, but because it was their original shape and is by far the most successful among other races in the universe. The colors of their crystal shells vary according to the region of the shard homeworld that they hail from, but they may also change colors when they are in a highly emotional state, the color of their matrices radiating through. When the shard first assumed their forms, they were unused to having bodies of any kind, and certainly not bodies formed of the crystalline nanite clusters. As a result, their shapes were rough and jagged, and they found it difficult to maintain their cohesion and simultaneously move and fight effectively. The shard had to teach themselves to live in bodies all over again. Gradually, as they become older and more powerful, they become more accustomed to the forms they are holding, and it is much easier for them to maintain their shape. As a result of this phenomenon, one can often determine the age and power of a shard simply by the form it takes. Young ones are always rough and spiky, prone to disproportionate sizes and lengths of limbs, while the older, more powerful shard are smooth as glass, beautiful but frightening crystal sculptures.

Shard faces are featureless, having no need for a nose, ears or even a mouth. Their imprisonment in the crystal husks, however, has made their once telepathic communications with one another impossible. As a substitute, they have formed specially configured vent systems in their throats through which they push minute amounts of energy in order to produce sound. This sound serves as their language, and is remarkably accurate and complex. Eerie and sibilant to others, it is nonetheless an efficient form of communication.

Shard bodies do not tire or bleed. The only way to disable a shard is to breach the crystal shell; such a breach is usually fatal, as their matrix within is sucked away by the Maw. Until that happens, they continue to function at full capability as long as their mental stamina endures. Because of this, the shard are generally tireless, their physical prowess being directly related to their mastery of the bond with their crystalline forms and their efficiency at manipulating them.

HISTORY

The shard are one of the oldest races in known space, having achieved pinnacles of evolution while the Earth was



still cooling. Their history stretches back more than one billion years, with achievements unequaled before or since by any other race. Their beginnings were much like those of any other race, their hardships and triumphs throughout the development of their civilization very similar to the trials of many others that would develop ages later on other planets. Eventually, after several millennia of slow growth, the shard had reached a level of technological development that made their lives leisurely enough for them to delve into more esoteric pursuits. Seeking to advance themselves as much as possible, a cultural movement began toward developing the one thing that they had not mastered: their minds. Over time, the shard learned to unlock areas of mental ability previously unknown, giving them new control over their environments and bodies. They discovered that the crystalline material that comprised their homeworld was extremely receptive to psychic manipulation, and learned to shape it mentally instead of working with it by hand. Many of them also discovered ways to heal, rest and otherwise physically develop themselves simply through manipulation of their bodies by their minds.

Eventually, one of the shard rulers, or primes, made a mental breakthrough that allowed him to separate his consciousness from his body, and a new era of shard life was ushered in. Soon the technique he used was taught throughout the world until it was universally known. The shard had learned the joys of existence without physical form, the end to which they would finally progress. They realized that maintaining bonds to their physical bodies was consuming a significant portion of their mental powers, limiting their real potential; it was only a matter of time until the inevitable took place. Beginning with a small group, and eventually in greater and greater numbers, the shard race abandoned their physical forms, choosing instead to exist solely as beings of pure energy. They released their bonds with their bodies, and allowed the energy matrix that is their soul and consciousness to slip away completely from the ties they had lived under for the entire history of their race. They became immortal.

The following millennia were a plateau of racial evolution during which the shard simply existed. Free from the worries of food, weather, wealth, illness or even the threat of death, they mastered the psychic manipulation of the nanite crystals of their home world, amusing themselves with feats of sculpture and etchings, vast palatial buildings (with no inhabitants) and other experimental endeavors. They learned that they could still reproduce in their energy forms, by two of them donating a large part of their own essence and forcing the patterns to combine into a single new energy field, which then took on its own consciousness.

Then, suddenly, their bliss was shattered. The shard world was devoured by the Maelstrom, pitched into it like a stone from a slingshot. The ravenous vortex snatched their

world from its niche in the cosmos and deposited it inside the chaotic swirl, another misfit planet targeted for unknown reasons by an incredibly powerful evil. Their planet collided with another upon its induction, fragmenting into five major pieces as well as countless smaller asteroid remnants. Had physical forms bound the shard when their world was destroyed, the race would most likely have been wiped out. In place of the destruction they would have suffered from physical annihilation, however, a much more painful demise befell them. Being creatures of pure energy, the shard were vulnerable to the tremendous energy thirst of the Maw. Grabbed by the unrivaled power of the Maelstrom's core, the matrices that made up their souls were dissolved, the energy that was their essence drawn into the ever-hungering vortex that would eventually consume everything within its reach. Those of the shard who were strong enough to resist the initial pull of the Maw quickly did the only thing they could—using their control over the crystal, they formed themselves bodies in which to house their matrices once again. It is in these forms that they still exist, eternally trying to escape the prison of the Maelstrom and waging war on the other races that are a constant reminder of the boundless freedom they are now denied.

DOMAIN

The shard homeworld was, at its apex of development, one of the most glorious worlds in the universe. Devoid of factories, houses, or any other marks of civilization, the surface of their planet was essentially an open-air art exhibit. Needing no physical structures to perpetuate their lives, the only thing the shard chose to tamper with once they left their bodies was the crystalline composite that made up the majority of the crust of their world. The surface of the planet was strewn with random sculptures, some small and simple models of the strange silicate-nourished plants that grew on the surface, others vast cathedral-sized feats of architecture that took several hundred shard nearly a century to complete. Upon its induction into the Maelstrom, this beautiful world was destroyed.

The fragments of their planet drifted throughout the Maelstrom, scattering the shard race. Though they can be found virtually anywhere within the Maelstrom, the shard make no effort to expand their territory and holdings through conquest. Their one primary goal is to become liberated from their prisons; their race has tasted freedom from material form and they want it back very badly. They feel that constantly being forced to wear bodies is beneath them, and it fills them with a deep hatred for all living things of flesh. Every voyage they take and every battle they enter serves the greater purpose of attempting to release themselves from the endless insult of imprisonment they now bear.

CULTURE

Shard culture was once the most refined and civilized in the universe. They valued peace, appreciated art, pondered philosophy, and followed many other pursuits that are the luxuries of the immortal. The enormity of the change they have undergone since their entry into the Maelstrom is staggering. All of their power and intelligence is now focused on the obsessive pursuit of escape, and they will stop at nothing to achieve it. They are warlike and bloodthirsty, and they take a bitter glee in the slaying of all flesh-wearing life-forms. Much of their technology was abandoned when they left mortality behind, and even now, the only material they use to any degree is the psychoreceptive crystal to which they are so closely tied. Everything in their fractured society is constructed of that material and is powered by the energy matrices of the shard themselves.

Though the shard hate all life-forms other than themselves, it should be noted that they bear a particularly focused hatred against the evil pharon. They see this vile race as a mockery of immortality, a fleshbound race attempting to claim an eternal life that they do not deserve. As a rule, they will attack the pharon on sight and fight to the death against them. The pharon find this distasteful because fighting with the shard holds no value for them. Shard corpses hold no life-giving fluids that the pharon can pump away, only swiftly escaping energies that dissipate into the air.

WAYS OF WAR

War is now a standard part of shard life. Needing neither food nor sleep, they are tireless and relentless in their pursuit of the secret of escape from the Maelstrom. The only thing that they despise nearly as much as their entrapment is the abundance of organic life with which they must constantly come into contact. The vast majority of a shard warrior's armament is contained within its shell. They transform parts of their body, usually an arm, into a crystal magnification system, through which small amounts of matrix energy are discharged as a ranged weapon. Close combat weaponry is similarly formed, simply by shaping a hand into a weapon through psychic manipulation of the crystal that composes it. These systems are simple, but extremely powerful; the energy blasts of their soul matrices are immensely destructive, and the crystal that composes their forms is diamond-hard.

Few that fight against the Shard live to talk of it, but those who do survive all describe the same terrible things: lethally effective crystalline humanoids hell-bent on annihilating their foes. Although the shard have much diversity within their race, there are several combat-based units that are seen on the battlefield time and time again.

The most common shard unit is the channeler; these excel in fighting at long distance by using ranged energy attacks. A channeler's arms bristle with many different types of lenses and vents, through which they channel their deadly essence into beams of powerful energy. The channelers are preceded on the field of battle by groups of the jagged, who focus on closing with the enemy to shred them with the assortment of razor-sharp outgrowths extending from their

bodies. The jagged are blindingly fast and agile, and if allowed to get close to an enemy position, they can take down many times their own number with relative ease.

The shard forces are usually headed by the notorious primes, who can become so consumed by their hatred for the enemy that they will go amok, attacking all they encounter without care for their own safety or well-being. Unfortunately, the unbridled fury present in most primes makes them extremely unstable, and they often end up sacrificing themselves in battle or attempting to exit the Maelstrom on their own, both tragic fates for creatures so highly developed.

There are occasional reports of an elder shard entering combat. These elders are far less aggressive than most shard, but they have access to powers that dwarf those of the majestic primes. Many of these elder shard were around when their world was pulled into the Maelstrom, and they have had eons to develop and enhance their control over all types of energy. So great is the prowess of these elders that they are rumored to be able to manipulate the flow of time and gravity in parts of the battlefield. These elders are protected with deadly determination by the other shard, and there are no known accounts of one falling in battle.

Shard tactics are primarily directed at mass disruption and demolition. Uninterested in gaining anything but the satisfaction they derive from winning their battles, they have no compunction about utterly destroying an enemy's stronghold or bathing an entire region in hazardous radiation. Shard prefer fast, hard-hitting assaults, but have also been known to use siege strategies, which they can do very effectively because of their tireless and self-sufficient natures. Needing no food or any other type of supplies, they can simply wait for the "carbons" to wear down before they move in for an easy kill.

THE PHARON

To the other races in the Maelstrom, the pharon are an enigma. Once the masters of an enormous intergalactic empire, the pharon have existed within the Maelstrom longer than any other known race. Their civilization is highly sophisticated, yet the pharon are extremely hostile toward other races. Nearly immortal, the pharon maintain a veil of secrecy over themselves as much as possible. In many ways, their merciless attacks on other races seem to be based on an extreme hatred of life itself. This rage is a by-product of the paradox of pharon existence—the pharon themselves are no longer alive. And in their view, the other inhabitants of the Maelstrom are not truly alive either; they are merely not yet slain.

APPEARANCE

One word describes the overall appearance of the pharon: dead. Very, very dead. Once the pharon were highly evolved humanoids, their bodies a pinnacle of physical appearance and function. Where once they were beautiful in form, now they are withered and discolored. Where once they were graceful and agile, now they are slow and ponderous.

Most pharon were long dead before they were returned to unlife. Though the mummification rites used by their ancestors prevented their bodies from rotting into dust, most were still horribly decayed by time's passage. The upper classes of pharon society have countered this by engaging in a great deal of physical restoration, attempting to return their ancient bodies to their previous robust form. Indeed, the beings that rule the upper tiers of their hierarchy are actually quite beautiful. On the other hand, the undead legions that form the pharon's front lines in battle are deteriorated to the point of being little more than shambling husks of twisted gray flesh. But this form is not without advantages; slow and cumbersome as their bodies may be, they are also incredibly strong and durable.

In striking contrast to their horrific appearance, the pharon's armor, clothing and weapons are extremely elegant and ornate. Pharon warriors wear elaborate, masterfully crafted suits of golden armor engraved with hieroglyphs and ancient symbols. The weaponry employed by the pharon resembles their armor, but their antique appearance belies the lethal destruction of which these weapons are capable. Pharon vehicles are also very elaborate and elegant, seeming quite beautiful as they streak across the battlefield, leaving a swath of destruction in their wake. When not at war, the pharon wear ceremonial garb consisting of robes and large gilded headdresses.

Less-preserved pharon warriors carry massive tanks and containers on their backs from which various tubes and hoses protrude, running into different places on the wearer's body. These hoses pump organic fluids into the pharon, keeping their bodies as functional and preserved as those in the upper echelons. The fluids used in this process are siphoned from all manner of corpses that the pharon scavenge in battle. Different varieties of organic life forms are distilled in an esoteric process, creating a life-preserving goo. The technologies or magics used to transform these fluids into life-giving energy are well hidden from other races.

HISTORY

The history of the pharon stretches back to the beginnings of the universe. Once a powerful intergalactic civilization, they ruled entire systems in an enormous and benevolent galactic empire. They frequently interacted with alien races in order to enrich their own culture, placing high emphasis on art, architecture and symbolic ritual. The character of the pharon empire changed dramatically and forever under the leadership of a tyrannical dynasty. Once open and friendly, pharon culture was twisted in its iron grip, turning toward darker and more hedonistic pursuits. Fear, torture and death were used to brutally silence any dissent, while those who surrendered their lives in servitude were exalted. Caught up in its own hubris, the dynasty erected huge monuments to its own glory and established intricate rituals to honor themselves even in death. Leaders were entombed in massive pyramidal structures, with hundreds of servants also slain and mummified to accompany and serve them in the afterlife.

Under this misguided leadership, the pharon empire was doomed to fall. After millennia of degenerating leadership, catastrophe finally struck in the form of an extensive war with

a civilization as technologically advanced as the pharon. The pharon refuse to speak of these foes and the humiliating defeat they suffered. Upon the near-eradication of their race, the remnants of pharon society scattered to the far corners of the universe, leaving behind thousands of lifeless worlds dotted with pyramidal tombs and the mummified dead.

For eons, the remains of the pharon lay forgotten, in mute testimony that even the mightiest can fall. Then the original homeworld of the pharon, whose name has been lost in the depths of history, was drawn into the Maelstrom. When the Maelstrom engulfs a world, it usually signals the beginning of the end for that world's inhabitants. But for the entombed pharon, it was merely a beginning.

The sophisticated mummification rites enacted by their ancestors centuries before had managed to protect the ancient bodies from the worst ravages of time. Within moments of the planet's induction, the once lifeless bodies of the pharon began to stir. Reborn like a dark phoenix rising from the ashes, their decayed and twisted corpses suddenly shuddered with new life. Speculation abounds as to how this occurred, from theories concerning exposure to some exotic gas or energy source, to claims that some ancient rite performed by the pharon ancestors had finally come to fruition. For now, the pharon only thank the Maelstrom for reviving them, and share their secrets with no one.

This once mighty race awoke to find a new universe, very unlike what they knew in ancient life. Their formerly strong physiques were now in horrible states of decay, needing constant rejuvenation through manipulated organic body fluids. Despite this situation, the pharon seem uninterested in regaining their original physical state, seeing flesh only as a vessel to transport their immortal souls.

Upon their return to life, the pharon wasted no time on trivial pursuits, immediately beginning to rebuild

their civilization, focusing on conquest. Seeing all other races as inferior, and therefore unworthy to lead their own lives, the pharon have declared war on every other inhabitant of the Maelstrom. Dark was the day that the pharon were reborn, for if the other races of the Maelstrom do not recognize the threat they represent, all could once again be held in their iron grip.

DOMAIN

Where other races avoid the Inner Ring, preferring to stay in the relative safety of the outermost regions, the pharon prefer to stay as close to the Maw as they can. The pharon homeworld itself lies as close to the Maw as is possible without being immediately drawn in. The pharons' ability to hold their planet in this position is of great interest to the Maelstrom's other inhabitants, as most worlds do not survive long enough to get anywhere near the Inner Ring, much less in proximity to the Maw itself. The planet seems unaffected by the Maw's gravitational pull, and remains untouched by the vicious tendrils of energy which occasionally lash from it. Many races assume that the pharon have access to some technology or magic that protects them from the Maw's effects, and wish to claim such power for their own.

Once a vast Mecca of sprawling cities and technological wonders, few remember what the pharon homeworld was like in its days of glory. Now the planet has been reduced to an arid, desert-like world. The pharon have not sought other climates because the dry, hot atmosphere is conducive to maintaining their delicate physical condition. Extremely cold environments hinder the flow of the life-giving fluids coursing through many of them, causing tissue to harden, joints to stiffen, and slowing the movement of an already cumbersome body. Wet or humid climates, on the other hand, cause increased decay in their ancient flesh, requiring more of the already valuable fluids to combat the accelerated deterioration.

Due to the unique nature of their physiology, the pharon are able to survive in airless vacuums, areas with lethal energy levels and other hostile environments uninhabitable by other species. The pharon are by far the dominant species within the Inner Ring, inhabiting several lifeless worlds and moons. In contrast, they inhabit no worlds in the outer regions of the Maelstrom, only venturing out to wreak havoc and inflict death on other races and then retreat back toward the Maw. Forces that have been in conflict with the pharon in both the Inner Ring and outer rings have noted that they somehow seem more powerful and deadly in combat the closer the battlefield is to the Maw.

CULTURE

Pharon society is organized into several layers. Slaves and workers make up the lower tiers; priests, nobles and warriors, the middle levels; and lords, queens and kings form the upper tiers. This order is never challenged; no one of lesser rank would dare question a superior under penalty of instant execution. A single individual, known as the God-king, dominates the pinnacle of this hierarchy. The God-king is the supreme ruler of the pharon society; his will is questioned by no one; his power is absolute. The pharon regard the God-king as immortal, and indeed his physical form has been destroyed several times, only to reappear. The pharon keep his name a secret from other races.

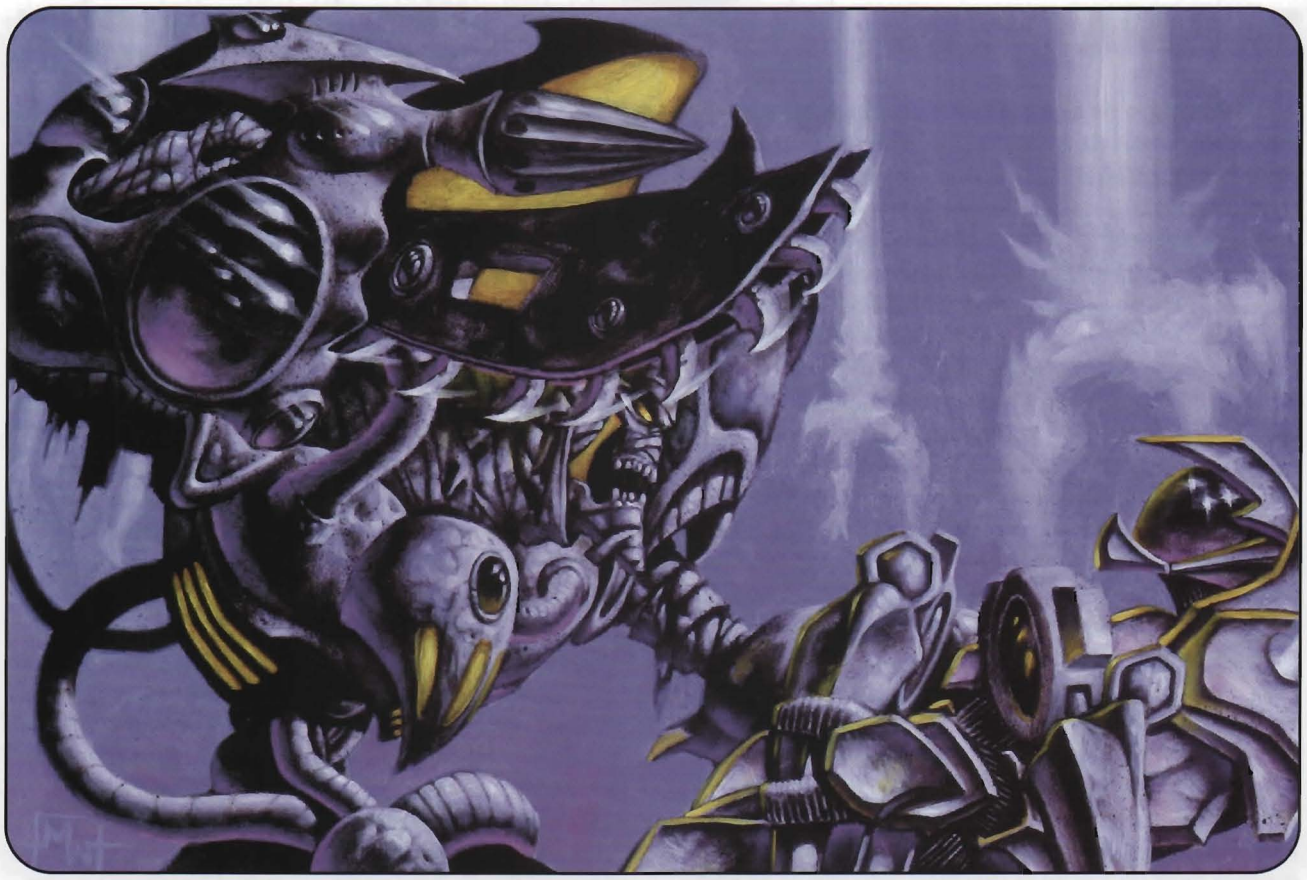
Below the God-king, the role of leadership splinters into a network of lesser beings such as lords, kings and queens. These subordinates carry out the God-king's will, personally seeing to his day-to-day affairs, which are unworthy of his attention. Below these lesser beings are nobles (who carry out the orders of those above them in the same way that the kings and queens carry out the will of the God-king) and priests. Priests are fanatical zealots who lead the rituals and ceremonies of the pharon and operate the numerous religious temples throughout their cities.

Pharon worship usually focuses on the God-king himself above all other things. The pharon participate in regular rituals involving the gathering of hundreds of thousands of worshipers in devotion to this God-king. These rituals usually end with a sacrifice of some sort, which can vary from the ceremonial execution of hundreds of beings captured from nearby planets, to the ritualistic suicide of loyal pharon priests. Many races claim to have found evidence that the pharon also worship the Maw itself, which they call "Vorack." They speculate that the term Vor, used by many races to describe the Maw, is derived from Vorack—perhaps the true name of the Maw.

Warriors, workers and slaves populate the bottom tiers of the hierarchy. Slaves form the bulk of the pharon population, numbering about ten slaves for every other member of their society. These slaves consist of captured living beings as well as the reanimated corpses of those the pharon have slain. Workers are basically slaves who have some sort of skill or trade and are privileged with a slightly better life than the common slave. While the battlefield is the natural place of the warrior, it is not uncommon to see slaves fielded in battle as well. A race in combat with the pharon to has to cut down resurrected bodies of its own species in order to get to the pharon themselves.

WAYS OF WAR

Relentless, merciless, destructive—this is the pharon at war. They descend upon the battlefield like a nightmare brought to life: ranks of shambling undead followed by pharon warriors wielding wicked weapons of mass destruction; deadly priests spewing unholy magic; or awesome engines of annihilation that pound opponents into dust. Pharon weapons are highly advanced technological terrors unlike anything else in the Maelstrom. While the pharon make extensive use of common energy weapons based upon heat and fusion technology, they also have a wide



range of unique devices such as soul-webs, purifiers, reaver cannons and the dreaded slayer suits.

When the pharon go to war, nearly all members of the pharon society participate, from slaves (which serve as nothing more than cannon fodder) to the kings and queens who serve as army generals. Priests are a common sight on the battlefield, appearing as lone individuals wielding the blackest magic imaginable, or organized into roving units of lethal hand-to-hand killers. Nobles also play a large part in the pharon military, serving as individual unit commanders or as pilots or artillerymen. The God-king himself has been known to appear on the battlefield as a truly frightening individual of awesome proportions who devastates anything in his path.

The pharon have been known to capture members of other races in order to use some sort of "soul transfer" technology, replacing the soul of the captive with the essence of a pharon. These captives are then returned to their respective races to act as spies or infiltrators.

After a battle is over, the pharon collect any survivors, who become prisoners, and also the bodies of the dead. Corpses are either turned into undead slaves at a later time or used to create the life-preserving gel that many pharon require. It has become a common expression among inhabitants of the Maelstrom that "you become a prisoner of the pharon whether they take you dead or alive." Because of this, other races in combat with the pharon attempt to recover or destroy the bodies of their dead rather than leave them for the pharon to add to their ranks.

Because of the unique physiology of the race known as the shard, the pharon are unable to use the bodies of these beings as they do others. For this reason, the pharon loathe battling the shard, as they have nothing to gain from it. This does not stop the pharon from engaging the shard on sight; they see them as their most dangerous rival because of their highly evolved status.

Many races find pharon battle strategies to be confusing. They frequently strike and seize locations that have no strategic importance to the other races in the Maelstrom. Usually, this means they catch their opponents off-guard, appearing seemingly from nowhere and attacking with fury. Their behavior in this regard is erratic and unfocused, almost as if they were attacking other races at random. Any type of species can become a target of their aggression, from the harmless natives of a primal world in the farthest corner of the Maelstrom to the highly evolved races clustered in advanced industrial strongholds. To the pharon, all others in the Maelstrom are considered foes.

THE MASHERS

The mashers are a race of brutal spaceborne primitives that wander about the Maelstrom searching for tech they can salvage for their barbaric activities. A race of master scavengers, they have even been known to strip enemy units of their gear and items in the heat of combat. Masher males are born with an extremely overactive nervous system which they can use to power salvaged devices that they crudely "mash" into their bodies. The mashers, being quite dim-witted, have developed very little technology themselves, and for the most part they rely on what they can loot and scavenge from the battlefield. Taskmasters—larger, more intimidating mashers—lead legions of masher grunts into battle, attempting to overwhelm and pummel their enemies into submission with sheer numbers. Masher forces will go wherever they think they can find more tech to salvage, and if a particularly large amount of tech is unearthed, it is common for many separate masher forces to congregate there to benefit from the new resource.

APPEARANCE

The average masher is about 5 feet tall and in many ways resembles a Neanderthal from Earth's distant past. Wide, powerful shoulders and a distinct but slightly hunchbacked stance are trademarks of the mashers' appearance. A masher's head sits low on its shoulders, with little or no neck visible. The face slopes inward and is significantly wider at the crown than at the jaw. The small, beady eyes of a masher are sunk deep underneath massive brows, and the mouth is full of irregular, unkept teeth. The body hair of a masher is more substantial than that of a human. It tends to be the densest on the shoulders, back and chest, though it is fairly common for a masher to have hair on its hands and feet as well. The arms of a masher are proportionately longer than those of a human; the hands and feet are slightly larger and more callused as well. Overall, the masher race is a physically strong and robust humanoid race whose most egregious fault seems to be a decisive lack of intelligence.

Most male mashers tend to have at least one mashed item on their bodies at all times, without regard to whether the item is actually useful. Mashed items tend be combat-related, for example, cutting tools or industrial robotics, but it is fairly common for mashers to have other, less combative, attachments as well: spotlights, fuseboxes, clocks and so on. Because they do not really understand the true nature of found objects prior to mashing them onto their bodies, mashers go through a trial-and-error process with all new attachments. If a device fails to work the way the masher hoped it would, then he will remove it and try something else. Mashers' bodies are riddled with extremely sensitive nerve endings that supply power to their body attachments, allowing them to add new items anywhere on their bodies.

However, larger devices that require more power need to be mashed on an area with more meat and muscle present, such as the back or shoulders.

Clothes are not a major concern for mashers; they usually wear little more than tattered rags. Mashers make use of acquired bolts and screws as a form of jewelry, screwing them into their bodies at various locations such as the chest, face and arms. Some mashers use this form of body marking to signify particular kills or tribal affiliations.

Another aspect of culture that mashers completely lack is personal hygiene. Mashers do not have a word for the act of bathing or cleaning oneself; it is a mystery to them why it would even be done. Since mashers never bathe, they are notorious for having quite a potent aroma. Some mashers smell so rank that they have been known to cause their opponents to retch and gag during combat. Though this effect is quite unintentional on the part of the mashers, it is nonetheless an important consideration when they are involved in close melee combat.

HISTORY

Considering all the pitfalls and hazards besetting the mashers, one marvels that they even survive, let alone prosper. Prior to entering the Maelstrom, the mashers were content hunter-gatherers living on their homeworld of Orth. They had not advanced very far as a sentient race, having no technology beyond simple tools for hunting and eating. However, the mashers' world was dotted by numerous piles of mysterious, metallic debris, referred to by the mashers as the "shiny mounds." Unbeknownst to the mashers, these were the remains of their planet's original founders, a race that destroyed itself violently in a series of apocalyptic wars. The mashers were the descendants of this race, having been forced to crawl from the rubble of the previous civilization and start anew, with nothing to show for the previous race's accomplishments.

It was an accident that led the mashers to learn of their "mashing" ability. The incident involved a much laughed-at masher named Kog, who fell into a "shiny mound" and accidentally attached an ancient weapon system to his body. Whenever Kog got excited or startled, he would activate the weapon's cannon; quite a few masher lives were lost before he learned to control the blasts. Once Kog adjusted to his new "limb," however, he quickly became the leader of his tribe. Eventually, Kog became ruler of all masher tribes, a first for this people. In the years following Kog's accident, he taught his people how to mash devices into their own bodies, and in time all the males in the entire race were doing it. This dramatically changed the mashers' way of life by giving them a means to use the endless amount of tech available in their precious "shiny mounds."

Once the mashers' homeworld was pulled into the Maelstrom, life once again changed significantly for this simple race of creatures. The dust had not even settled on the

planet before a race of machines landed, eager to pillage what they could from the newly inducted world. The invaders seized control of the helpless planet with ruthless efficiency, easily cutting through what little resistance the masher people offered. The fates had played a cruel joke on the mashers by sending a race of subjugators that were pure machine. The mashers revered these invaders as gods, and allowed themselves to be dominated. They viewed the machines as saviors, hoping they would bring an end to the geological upheavals that had ravaged the planet since its induction into the Maelstrom.

Within weeks, it became clear to the mashers that they would not be saved by their gods, and rumblings of revolution began to spread through the populace. When the mashers rose up against the invading machines, they did so with a startling and brutal ferocity, intent on taking their world back or dying in the process. They were led by their first and only king, the mighty Kog. The containment camps the machines had designed to house the millions of mashers fell one at a time, the population of each camp adding to the growing numbers able to fight against the machines. For a few days, the entire surface of the planet was embroiled in war between the two factions. Finally, the mashers managed to cripple the machines' operations to such an extent that they were forced to pull off of the ravaged globe and cut their losses. The mashers had other ideas, however. As the massive landing craft of the machines readied for departure, the mashers swarmed the launch sites in a desperate attempt to prevent their would-be oppressors from escaping. Many of the ships were overtaken in this battle, giving the mashers valuable technology in the form of functional space craft. Though it had cost the mashers a great deal of bloodshed, the machines were utterly routed. Much of the tech gained from this war can still be seen amongst the masher hordes scattered about the Maelstrom.

DOMAIN

Sadly, only a scant few years after the mashers' war for freedom from the machines, their world of Orth took on a slightly more severe orbit around the Maw. Over the course of a decade their planet was pulled into the Central Ring of the Maelstrom. Convinced that Orth was doomed to be swallowed into the Maw, many masher tribes fled their world in the captured ships of the machines. Others began looking at the "shiny piles" of their planet in a different light, hoping to find something useful for escaping Orth before it was too late. When the planet's orbit stabilized, it was in a much more violent and dangerous region of the Maelstrom than before. Roughly a quarter of the masher population remained on Orth, the rest having found some means of leaving the planet in favor of life abroad. These occasionally make their way back to their homeworld when they can find it.

The mashers that have left Orth travel in large groups in search of any and all tech that they can salvage for their own purposes. It is rare that mashers will have a specific destination at any given time, choosing instead to travel about in a haphazard fashion. Mashers prefer to dwell in the Central Ring, as it has a much denser volume of planets and debris ripe for salvage and plunder. The closer proximity of worlds there allows the crude ships of the mashers to travel more quickly between them. In the Outer Ring, the mashers are required to make much longer journeys through space, which, considering the state of masher technology, is a dangerous experience. Understandably, mashers have no love of space flight; their simple minds balk at considering the vastness of space. Therefore, when a tribe of mashers finds a world rich in lootable tech, they will land there and attempt to colonize it. Tyrnt-6 is one such example—an industrial world within the Central Ring that until the mashers found it was abandoned and devoid of any intelligent life (and arguably still is). Blessed with an extremely quick reproductive cycle, the mashers were able to spread throughout the planet's densely building-covered surface at an alarming rate. Whatever it was that killed the original inhabitants of the planet does not seem to be of much concern to the mashers. There are currently six confirmed worlds that mashers have colonized in the Central Ring and three in the Outer Ring; however, there are undoubtedly far more undetected colonies through out the Maelstrom.

CULTURE

Mashers believe they were created by beings that were entirely mechanical. They treat the "shiny mounds" that dot the landscape of their homeworld Orth as holy mounds, and they offer sacrifices to them in an endless attempt to get their metallic gods to acknowledge them in some way. Though the machine invasion soured many mashers on their traditional religion, the mounds are still revered and serve an important role in masher social status.

In masher society, the more mashed items one has, the stronger one's position in the tribe. This has led to many a masher's untimely death as he overloads on mashed items and loses his mind. Some of the past masher kings have so heavily burdened themselves with mashed items that they required numerous external devices in order to move around without toppling over. A masher king rules all the separate tribes in his domain, and there is only ever one of these at a time on any given world. The masher king is personally attended by the tribe that is currently most in his favor. Underneath the masher king is the tribal lord whose job is to command and maintain his particular tribe. Any tribal lord will have a number of taskmasters who train and organize the tribe's warriors and lead them into battle. Below the taskmasters are the grunts, the backbone of every masher tribe. Masher workers are seldom used in battles. These sad individuals are the males that were born without the mashing ability; as a result, they are treated as second-rate members of masher society.

Mashers are amazed by fire of any sort. Prior to their entrance into the Maelstrom, a stray fire caused by a bolt of lightning would result in an initial panic, followed by days of celebration. Try as they might, however, the poor mashers could never manage to keep the blaze going, and they became saddened when the flames would die out. Now, even though the mashers nearly always have some way of creating fire via the many salvaged items they acquire, they still are frightened and amazed by it. This fascination can be capitalized on by enemies in battle: the appearance on the battlefield of any fire-based weapon can cause even the most seasoned taskmaster to stop dead in his tracks or even run in fear.

Masher females are fiercely protected and respected by masher males. It is a rare occurrence when a female is even allowed to be viewed, and masher males never allow the females to be placed in danger. This reverence for their females stems from the mashers' amazement with the birthing process, which they attribute wholly to the female. They do not yet understand the connection between the act of sex and the process of birth, considering it to be some kind of magic of which only the females are capable. There have never been any accounts of a masher female exhibiting the mashing ability.

WAYS OF WAR

Mashers tend to fight in large masses, trying to overrun the enemy by outnumbering them. When this doesn't work, they are more than capable of sticking it out for a prolonged battle. Mashers love to get up close and personal in a fight, swarming over their foes and relieving them of their belongings in the heat of battle. Other forces have picked up on this tactic quickly, and are extremely reluctant to allow mashers to draw too close.

Standard masher infantrymen are referred to as "grunts," and they use one of two different weapons when they fight; a Thumper club or a spike gun. The Thumper club is a heavily favored conventional wooden club modified with attachments such as saw blades, spinning tips and so on. A spike gun is a crudely manufactured device designed to fire 6-inch pieces of metal at high speeds towards a foe. The spike gun fires one spike at a time and has to be manually reloaded and readied after each shot. It is not a fast weapon to use in a firefight, but it gets the job done. Most of the weapons that a masher employs in battle are powered by the masher's own nervous system. Just as mashed items are powered by the masher's body, unmashed weapons can get power from the same source. A masher simply uses the existing power cable on a weapon to "plug" the item into his body during a fight.

Taskmasters, who lead the grunts into battle, tend to be substantially larger than a standard grunt. The taskmasters are chosen from the biggest and baddest mashers available,

and they nearly always have one or more mashed items. In addition to weapons and tools, taskmasters are known for having some alternate form of locomotion mashed onto their bodies. This makes their job as leader much easier by improving their battlefield mobility. The most common way this is accomplished among taskmasters is by replacing their legs with a walker platform with numerous robotic legs.

Some mashers who mash too much into their bodies eventually go mad or insane as a result. These unfortunates are used in battle as weapons platforms upon which heavy weapons can be mounted. Much too large for a single masher to use safely, these are then powered by the already mindless brutes.

Masher vehicles are a ragtag, motley collection of salvage contraptions. Many are barely functional or have been rebuilt by the mashers, who have exceedingly poor craftsmanship. Mashers usually power their vehicles themselves; in larger vessels there will be a number of mashers specifically used for this purpose alone.

Unlike the other races, the mashers had barely begun to develop a real culture and society prior to coming into the Maelstrom, and it seems in many ways that their world's induction is giving them a crash course in survival. Many of the common aspects of a race's development are being bypassed in the case of the mashers; as a species, they were practically born directly into an atmosphere of pure warfare and conflict. What this is going to mean for their future is difficult to say. What is clear, however, is that they are incorporating and adapting new technologies into their arsenals at an alarming rate, a tendency that should concern most other races tremendously. If the mashers were ever to comprehend fully the devices that they use for war, they would become a truly fearsome military force.

THE GOLEMS

Golems are ruthless, merciless beings, utterly devoid of emotion. They see other life-forms as little more than resources, slaves to be used in genetic experiments or for backbreaking labor. The golems were space-faring conquerors long before their planet was devoured by the Maelstrom, and their imprisonment in the vortex has not changed their ambitions.

Large, expressionless creatures with rough, stony skin, golems are actually two separate entities, one intelligent, the other mindless. The intelligent entity is a small creature that lives at the base of the golem's skull and directs the movements of the powerful, humanoid body. The two beings exist in a symbiotic relationship.

The golems possess a powerful and advanced technology and have had considerable success in adapting to life in the Maelstrom. Unlike any other known race surviving in the Maelstrom, the golems are able to survive within the Veil; their great warships cruise through the smoky gray barrier that surrounds the Maelstrom, emerging only to attack, conquer and enslave.

The golems have slowly begun to assert themselves in the Maelstrom and to rebuild their fallen empire. Their cold, merciless tactics and powerful weapons make them a formidable adversary.

APPEARANCE

At first glance, it is difficult to tell if golems are living creatures or complex organic machines. Their movements are stiff and mechanical, and their faces remain utterly expressionless, regardless of circumstance. Their bodies are encased in heavy, powerful armor, and the small amount of exposed flesh appears to be as cold and hard as stone.

Golems are large, bipedal creatures standing an average of 6.5 to 7 feet tall. Those that have been encountered by other races are massive, physically intimidating beings with extremely broad shoulders and powerful frames, their rough, mottled skin ranging in color from dark gray to white. The largest of the symbionts that serve as the intellect of the golem measure 12 inches.

The golems are an ancient race, and the relationship between the body and the symbiont evolved over many millenia. When the two lifeforms were no longer able to live separately, the dual entity began conducting genetic research to improve their body. The constant influx of new lifeforms into the Maelstrom, each with unique evolutionary adaptations and a unique genetic composition, allows the golems to continue their research into creating a superior body and refining its functions and physical abilities.

The small symbiont is inserted into the host body at the base of the neck, where it effectively swims into the host through a small incision in the skin. Once inside, the creature curls up in the skull and wraps fine tendrils around the base of the brain in order to link with the golem's nervous system. Eventually, these tendrils become an inextricable part of the golem's body and the two creatures are linked forever. The intelligent parasite controls every movement of the larger creature's body. The two are as one.

The symbiont's position inside the head is protected by a thick skull with a pronounced brow. In addition, all golems wear power armor, which is fitted to them soon after the two creatures are joined and is rarely, if ever, removed. Certain golems take additional protective measures and wear a retractable shield that extends up from the shoulders of their armor and curves around the back of the head. Golem commanders wear a thick helmet that covers the entire head. Though other races fail to grasp the aesthetic of the golem power armor, the armor's design is more than just utilitarian.

While most golems are huge, broad-shouldered hulks suitable for battle, other body types have been genetically engineered to perform specialized tasks. For example, golem technicians are tall and slender, with long, narrow fingers and thin arms, a form perfectly suited for the fine technical tasks they perform.

Golems live an average of five hundred years, though a few have survived as long as eight hundred years. A testament to the extraordinary achievements of their genetic engineering, the golem body frequently lives on after the small symbiont within dies. Because it is impossible to insert a second symbiont into the body, the mindless hulks are retrieved and dumped into a chemical bath that breaks them down into their constituent parts for re-engineering.

HISTORY

For eons, the golems soared among the stars, stripping planets of their resources and enslaving the inhabitants of populated worlds. They carved out a vast, interstellar empire and ruled it without mercy. They built awe-inspiring cities and machines capable of leveling mountains. They crushed all who opposed them, annihilating ancient cultures and emerging civilizations with equal efficiency, scattering the survivors to the stars. They were an irresistible force, secure in their supremacy.

Then they encountered the Maelstrom.

Their planet, the seat of their power, the very core of their star-spanning empire, was abruptly drawn into the vortex. Chaos erupted.

The Maelstrom wreaked havoc upon the planet, pounding it with electromagnetic storms and bombarding it with debris. The golem homeworld was rocked by volcanic eruptions and powerful earthquakes. The ceru, slaves who had served the golems for centuries, seized the moment and rebelled against their masters. Overwhelmed by their sudden change of fortune and stunned by the ceru rebellion, the golems struggled to adjust. Their cities were falling around them; their empire was beyond their reach. What happened

next nearly destroyed them.

A writhing tentacle of indescribable energy whipped out from the heart of the Maelstrom and seized their homeworld, drawing it toward the Maw. The golems were forced to abandon their home, fleeing into the Maelstrom in huge warships and watching helplessly as their planet was dragged to annihilation.

In a matter of days, they had lost everything.

For decades, the golems pursued their war with the ceru, who had abandoned the golem homeworld in ships stolen from their masters. The ceru fought for survival and to remain free of the golems; the golems fought to regain control of their former slaves. Eventually, the ceru won their freedom and the golems chose to concentrate on adapting to their new surroundings and rebuilding their fallen empire—this time, inside the vortex.

The golems have dwelt in the Maelstrom for nearly three centuries. Because they live so long, many golems vividly recall the events that led to the fall of their interstellar empire, yet those events barely affect their way of life.

Though, as intelligent creatures, they initially felt discouraged by the loss of their power, they have since adapted to circumstances and renewed their efforts to control vast new territories. The realization that even the mightiest empire can be destroyed has made them more ruthless and single-minded than ever.

DOMAIN

The golems have established bases in strategic locations throughout the Outer Ring, but the vast majority of them dwell in huge warships that patrol the perimeter of the Maelstrom from within the Veil. How the golems survive in the Veil is a mystery, though it must be assumed that they possessed or have developed technology that enables them to do so. Even the golem are unable to pass through the Veil and leave the Maelstrom, however. The remains of an apparent attempt to leave the Maelstrom still float ominously in orbit around the Outer Ring. The golem ship is twisted and warped, bristling with scarred remains of other races' ships that were somehow fused together, creating a miniature version of the fate of many planets inducted into the Maelstrom. Even the bodies of the crew are torn by their own weapons and melded with bits of alien landscapes. This gruesome scene serves as a reminder of the power of the strange, deadly anomaly in which the golem are trapped.

The golems cruise the periphery of the Outer Ring, searching for planets that have recently entered the Maelstrom. The inhabitants of such worlds are usually too disoriented to effectively resist an invasion, and the golem warships attack rapidly and mercilessly, slaying or enslaving the local population and controlling strategic points on the planet. The golems already control several small worlds in the Outer Ring, but are expanding their influence slowly to avoid spreading themselves too thin and to maintain a position of strength.

CULTURE

Golem culture is focused primarily on conquest, genetic research and the propagation of their species. The golems are only interested in the world around them if it can be made useful. They have little natural curiosity, scientific or otherwise; their only goal is to increase their numbers and insure their own survival. They concluded long ago that the best way to accomplish this was to enslave or eliminate the competition. Their interest in any phenomenon, in fact, extends only to its immediate usefulness, and so anything they determine to be without value is abandoned or, in the case of life-forms, destroyed. It is a simple but effective philosophy.

The golems spend an enormous amount of time and energy developing new technology and improving their existing technology. Most of their efforts focus on genetic engineering, military technology and energy generation, but they also have devoted considerable effort to studying and understanding the Maelstrom and the various life-forms that dwell within it.

The golems have devised a number of ways to generate the energy necessary to power their gargantuan warships and weapons of destruction, creating energy using everything from field-propulsion systems to cold fusion, from anti-matter engines to nuclear power. They have even attempted to harness the power of the Maelstrom itself, with disastrous results.

The golems' primary scientific interest is in genetic engineering. Over the centuries, their research in this field has enabled them to continually improve their bodies. The wide variety of life-forms within the Maelstrom, each with its own unique elements and composition, serves as a rich and varied pool of specimens, which the golems use to modify their bodies. They also use these other species to develop biological weapons—and test them. Uninhibited by morals, the ruthless golems will use any weapon that gives them an advantage.

The golems have no use for religion, and in fact fail to understand the concept of a deity. Far from being philosophical or introspective, the golems represent a strange mix of instinct and intelligence, driven to both great scientific achievements and ruthless acts by the simple desire to survive and propagate.

Golem society follows a rigidly structured caste system. The race is ruled by an Overlord, who directs the efforts of the caste leaders and the military. The Overlord is born into his role and, should he fall in battle or perish by some other means, a successor is always waiting.

A golem may not act outside the boundaries and responsibilities of his caste, on pain of death. Each golem is expected to perform the duty of his caste; nothing more, nothing less. There is no evidence that a golem has ever stepped outside its duty and survived. The desires of an individual are nothing compared to the needs of the race.

WAYS OF WAR

War is a way of life for the golems. They live to conquer, to subjugate other life-forms, to battle for what they desire. It is the only life they know.

The golems once ruled a thousand worlds, and their vast empire was largely built and maintained by the wretched survivors of their interstellar invasions. Most of these slaves were left behind when the golem homeworld was pulled into the Maelstrom. Only the ceru and a relatively small number of other slaves survived the transition. The ceru won their freedom. Most of the other slaves died when the golems abandoned their homeworld. Handicapped in their efforts to rebuild their empire by the loss of their slaves, the golems often send their slave ships in the initial approach to newly arrived worlds, seeking to quickly subjugate the inhabitants and so replace the massive work force they lost.

The golems wage war without mercy, doing whatever is necessary to assure victory. In all-out war, they will seek to destroy an opponent utterly, using excessive force without regard for the damage to potential spoils. Their warships will bombard a planet with huge chunks of rock or rain down great blasts of plasma upon the surface, causing massive destruction. The golems also use a variety of other tactics and weapons, from the huge, enigmatic creatures known as Ancestors to horrible biological weapons. Any weapon that proves effective, they will use.

The golems rarely use scorched-earth tactics, preferring to intimidate rather than destroy. When the golems attack a planet, they sweep across the sky in huge warships, landing vehicles and troops on the surface and blasting the largest targets into oblivion. When the sheer size and power of their ships fail to completely demoralize their victims, they rely on their ground forces, both infantry and vehicles, to finish the job.

All golem troops wear the power armor that is their trademark. Composed of thousands of ultra-thin layers of alloy laced with circuitry, this armor is extraordinarily strong and durable, able to protect the golems from other races' most effective weapons. Each suit is powered by a small but potent energy source that is carefully shielded in the back of the armor, and equipped with a variety of weapons that can be mounted to the forearms, waist, shoulders, legs and back. Though the golems' lack of agility and slow, mechanical movements make close combat difficult, the strength their armor provides makes the golems deadly hand-to-hand

fighters. Most golem power armor is black, with unit designations indicated in various color accents and symbols.

Golem troops are divided into four categories: commanders, pounders, advancers and slavers.

Commanders are the leaders, the generals of the golem army. They wear the best armor and carry the deadliest, most potent weaponry available. Commanders determine strategy and lead troops into battle.

Pounders use ranged projectile weapons to lay down covering fire for advancing troops. They bombard opponents with missiles and fire smoke and gas bombs to obscure the enemy's vision. Pounders will engage the enemy up close when ranged combat becomes ineffective.

Advancers form the majority of golem troops. These soldiers march inexorably forward, blasting away at the enemy with powerful lasers which they sweep back and forth as they walk deliberately into combat. Their cold, expressionless gaze, glimpsed through the battlefield haze, can unnerve even the most stouthearted opponent.

Slavers are used in combat to direct slave troops in situations where the golems are outnumbered or reluctant to join the battle for strategic reasons. For example, the golems will sometimes use slave troops to gather data about a new opponent and examine the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. In most cases, slavers land when the battle is ended to round up enemy survivors and prepare them to serve their new masters.

Golem vehicles are covered in thick, durable armor comparable to their power armor and are heavily armed. The golems use massive troop transports, anti-gravity tanks and unmanned, automated assault vehicles, in addition to a host of smaller, more specialized vehicles.

Golems are fearless fighters. Because they feel no emotion, they cannot be intimidated or frustrated on the battlefield. They are virtually immune to pain and most wounds have no psychological impact on them. A head injury, however, will occasionally cause the golem to panic, and it will flee or collapse.

The golems have no allies.

THE CERU

The ceru (pronounced SERR-oo) are a proud, fiercely independent race. Once slaves to the merciless golem, the ceru have broken free of their former masters and firmly established themselves in the Maelstrom. A nomadic race, the ceru have lived within the ever-changing vortex for centuries, and have proven to be among the most resourceful of its inhabitants.

The ceru have a flair for machines and are skilled at salvaging alien technology and putting it to their own uses, often incorporating disparate components into ingenious devices. Commonly characterized as gearheads, the ceru roam the Maelstrom in small gangs, seeking salvageable materials from which they create magnificent machines.

The ceru are not conquerors, but they are excellent fighters, and the personal glory they can achieve in combat is of the utmost importance to them. They love a good brawl and will rarely back down or surrender, regardless of the odds. Ceru are aggressive beings, willing to face any challenge, especially if the rewards—renown and technology—are great. Their hatred of the golem is absolute, and they will do anything to thwart the plans of their former masters.

APPEARANCE

The ceru are short, blue-skinned bipeds ranging in size from 4 to 5 feet tall. They are broad-shouldered, barrel-chested and stout, with black, unkempt hair that often falls to their shoulders in dreadlocks. Occasionally, ceru males have white or gray hair, but it is rare.

Ceru eyes range in color from gold to dark blue, with gold being the most common color. Their hands have three fingers and an opposable thumb, which, though short and solid, is surprisingly dexterous. Their blue skin is thick and tough and resist cuts and abrasions.

Ceru are muscular, but have a tendency to develop large guts as they grow older. The flesh on their faces is looser than that on the rest of their bodies, and it droops in folds down the forehead, ending in a pronounced brow. A thick flap of skin stretches horizontally across the face to cover the bridge of the nose.

Ceru gangs can be found wearing armor salvaged from fallen opponents, helmets found on the battlefield, strange bits of alien technology and anything else that appeals to their unique tastes. Most ceru, particularly salvage crews and technicians, wear large belts with a variety of tools and weapons attached. They are generally fond of tattoos, body painting, dark clothing, vests and arm bands, but their sense of style is too idiosyncratic to neatly categorize.

The ceru like to impress one another with their accomplishments, and their choice of clothing reflects their rugged individualism. Rarely are two ceru dressed exactly alike; the concept of a uniform holds no appeal for them. They prefer to decorate themselves and their vehicles with battlefield trophies in a constant effort to upstage their fellows. As a result, few ceru dress alike, though members of ceru gangs will often try to emulate their leader's sense of style. For example, the ceru leader Korvak wears the skin of a Razorback growler bull as a cape around his neck, a reminder to all other ceru that he slew the mighty beast in battle. In an attempt to emulate their leader and idol, several of his followers wear growler-skin capes as well, but they are the skins of growler pups, painted with their own favorite colors and designs.

HISTORY

The ceru have a tragic and turbulent history. For thousands of years, they thrived on their home planet of Thaull, building intricate cities and raising monolithic monuments to their gods. Like any civilization, the ceru experienced growing pains—they fought brutal wars, exploited and abused their planet's resources and were nearly destroyed by disease. Yet they survived these trials and reached great achievements: civilization, technology, flight and space travel. Then the golem came.

The golem swept across the sky in gargantuan ships and battered Thaull with devastating weapons. Faced with such a powerful adversary, the ceru never had a chance. They were slaughtered and enslaved. Their planet was raped, its resources devoured. The golem left Thaull a dead place, devoid of life and covered in the shattered remains of ceru civilization.

For 700 years, the ceru served the golem, fighting and dying for their merciless masters. Rebellion was unthinkable, freedom hopeless, and so they served and learned. The golem instructed the ceru in the use of their advanced technology, and the intelligent, adaptable ceru learned quickly. Soon they were developing new weapons and technology for their inscrutable masters. The golem made full use of the ceru's natural gifts for tinkering and building, and they became craftsmen, mechanics and engineers.

The ceru were also used as warriors. The intense, determined ceru were able to fight in ways the slower, more massive golem could not. They made excellent shock troops, and ceru grav bikes were often at the forefront of golem attacks. The ceru adapted to life under the golem, retaining their beliefs and slowly becoming an integral part of golem culture. However, like all slaves, they resented their situation and hated their masters. They longed for an opportunity to rebel, to be free.

When the Maelstrom seized the golem homeworld, the ceru saw their opportunity. They turned on their masters, using the golem weaponry and technology against them. The two races fought a long, bloody war, but the ceru finally gained their freedom and escaped into the Maelstrom, where they have roamed and lived for centuries, salvaging and surviving.

DOMAIN

Most of the ceru are scattered in small gangs throughout the Maelstrom's Central and Outer Rings. They go where they can find the materials they need to build, maintain and modify their weapons and vehicles. They travel in small ships, often pieced together from alien technology, searching the vortex for ruins, precious metals, salvageable materials and stable areas with the potential to sustain life.

Though the ceru are nomads, they have established outposts and settlements throughout the Outer Ring of the Maelstrom. These settlements are rarely large or permanent, though there are a few exceptions. One such is a small, green world the ceru call Urt'trauk, whose orbit lies midway through the Outer Ring. The ceru have built a small industrial complex on Urt'trauk, and the planet is of great importance to them as one of the few stable places where they have found the resources necessary to build and maintain their technology. Urt'trauk is heavily fortified and has twice resisted attempts at invasion and conquest.

The ceru are determined to maintain control over the section of the Maelstrom containing Urt'trauk, and they have set up security measures and warning signs to alert them to any intrusion. Mechanical probes, known as sentinels, patrol the periphery of ceru-held space, watching for signs of danger. All sentinels are armed, comprising the first line of defense against intruders and potential invaders. When potentially hostile lifeforms enter ceru territory, they are immediately repelled or destroyed. There is no attempt at negotiation.

The ceru frequently run up against mashers while undertaking salvage operations. As both races engage in heavy technological scavenging, they are in constant competition. Over time, however, the ceru and mashers have grown to mutually respect each other as adversaries. On occasion, the two races have set aside their conflict to mutually destroy another competitor, so that they can return to their own intense rivalry undisturbed.

CULTURE

It has been nearly a thousand years since the ceru's home planet of Thaull was destroyed by the golem, along with most of their original culture. However, during their servitude to the golem, the ceru hung on to certain traditions, and their religious beliefs remain virtually intact. Nevertheless, time and circumstance have irrevocably changed ceru culture. In a millennium, they have lost their homeworld, suffered as slaves, and won their freedom. The trials they have undergone served as a crucible, and they have emerged as tough and hard as steel. They also emerged with perspective; they appreciate life and attempt to live it to its fullest potential.

The ceru actually enjoy living in the Maelstrom. They consider the opportunity to be free, the chance to fight, to salvage, roam and explore, to be a gift. The nomadic structure of their society allows them to do the things they enjoy most and, though life is hard, it is often rewarding.

The ceru worship an entire pantheon of gods, but one in particular is revered above all others: Ur-thaull, the Maker. Ur-thaull bestows life and grants honorable death. His mighty hands molded the mountains and scattered the planets throughout the universe. His will guides all things. The ceru believe that to create is to honor Ur-thaull, and so they build relentlessly, using anything and everything they can find, wasting as little as possible.

Given their scattered population, ceru society is loosely structured. The ceru are ruled by an Emperor, or Ur-thaull'chek (meaning he who is closest to Ur-thaull). There is no governing body beyond the Emperor, and he makes few decisions regarding the laws and rules by which the ceru live. Those rules are traditions, handed down from the Maker himself, and few ceru defy them.

The Emperor resides on Tak-Thaull (or New Thaull), a cloudy blue planetoid whose location in the Maelstrom is a closely guarded secret. Tak-Thaull is carefully protected, and is thought to reside in the vicinity of several other large ceru settlements, near the green world of Urt'trauk. The Ur-thaull'chek is protected at all times by his personal guard, a group of fifty ceru carefully chosen and trained for the job. All of these ceru are completely devoted to their ruler and will do anything to protect him from harm.

The Emperor has no personal advisors, save his mate. He commands the ceru in times of war and presides over ceru games (primarily races and contests of strength). Occasionally, he settles disputes between gang leaders. His duty is to lead, and he guides the ceru's efforts to create a stable, safe home for themselves in the Maelstrom.

Each ceru gang that roams the Maelstrom is composed of a leader, or Urt'thuk, and anywhere from five to fifty ceru, usually male. The leader is chosen by the gang and is usually a battle-hardened veteran with a long list of accomplishments. Ceru are very competitive, loving nothing more than to brag about their personal achievements. Most leaders are covered in trophies and scars, and it is these displays of glory and experience that qualify them to lead. Ceru gang members will go to great lengths to impress or imitate their Urt'thuks, often risking life and limb to gain the admiration of their leader.

A gang is only as good as the Urt'thuk that leads it, and rivalries between gangs are strong. Each gang is determined to be the best, to accomplish the most, and they will go to absurd lengths to prove their mettle. For example, a ceru might install an engine on his grav bike that is much too powerful for practical use. However, in his determination to impress his fellows, he will stubbornly refuse to acknowledge the impractical nature of the engine and continue using it until he propels himself into a wall or shoots right past a target on the battlefield. Only the embarrassment of failure will convince him to grudgingly acknowledge his error in judgment.

Not all efforts to prove their worth are so innocent. Arguments about which gang is superior often lead to brawls, and rival gangs will actually become quite vicious if something valuable is at stake. Rival gang leaders have been known to kill one another over a particularly prized bit of salvaged technology.

Though the competitive nature of the ceru can lead to intense conflict, all differences are put aside when they are faced with a common enemy. Under such circumstances, the oldest and most-respected Urt'thuks assume leadership (under the guidance of the Emperor), and the ceru transform from scattered gangs into a formidable army.

WAYS OF WAR

The ceru dislike war, but they love a good fight! More precisely, they are reluctant to waste lives and resources in large-scale combat unless they consider the prize worth the cost. Brawling, however, is a favored pastime, loved for the challenge and the increased reputation to be gained. If there's glory or a particularly inviting piece of technology at stake, the ceru are more than willing to duke it out.

There is an exception to the ceru's philosophy on war: the golem. The ceru loathe their former masters and eagerly engage them in battle. If they had the means, they would wipe the golem from existence.

The ceru wage war with a wide variety of weapons. Their outposts and settlements are usually guarded by powerful plasma cannons and electromagnetic weapons. They also use simpler, but equally effective artillery, as well as alien technology that they have found and modified to suit their purpose. However, the vast majority of ceru weapons are built and designed by the ceru themselves.

In large-scale combat, the ceru use their heavily armored salvage ships as assault craft. These ships are armed and extremely maneuverable, making them versatile and deadly on the battlefield. The ceru cannot resist modifying and improving their machines, and so each salvage ship has its own unique combination of armor and weaponry.

Most ceru ride into battle on grav bikes, personal vehicles that have been modified and adapted to this purpose. The ceru take great pride in these bikes, and are constantly tinkering with them, adding weaponry and trophies to the body and attempting to improve the engine. Grav bikes use a field-propulsion system, often complemented by an alternate propulsion mechanism for added speed and maneuverability. These secondary propulsion systems are unnecessary, but the ceru can't resist juicing up the bike's potential and appearance. If rocket thrusters make the bike look better, they're added on.

Ceru leaders usually ride the most heavily customized grav bikes into battle, sometimes accompanied by a small retinue of close buddies. Some leaders prefer to leave the driving to others and sit on the back of two-man grav bikes, blasting away at opponents with a ratchet gun or heavy laser. Others are superstitious and ride the same grav bike on which they won their first battle. All of them jet forward eagerly, leading their gangs into combat with the fierce and reckless confidence of a battle-hardened veteran.

Large ceru gangs are broken up into squads, and each squad rides a different kind of grav bike. Most ceru charge into battle on thrusters, quick bikes designed for speed and maneuverability. The ceru zoom in and out of skirmishes on these bikes, dropping mines, firing at opponents or slashing out with bladed weapons as they cruise by. It's an effective strategy that leaves opponents disoriented while making the rider difficult to strike.

Smashers are low-flying, heavily armored grav bikes used to ram opponents. These banged-up bikes are a crude but effective way of subduing a powerful enemy. Smashers are particularly effective against infantry, and their battle-

crazed riders love nothing more than slamming through columns of enemy troops with brutal force. Most smashers are equipped with a blunt ramming device, but many have a retractable spike on the end for spearing opponents. This is a dangerous tactic that often results in the rider being thrown from the bike if the spike is too deeply embedded in the target. Even so, it is a favorite choice of reckless, and often unstable, smasher squads.

Ceru with an affinity for explosives ride blasters, grav bikes that serve as platforms for a variety of explosive artillery weapons, from cluster bombs to torpedoes. Blasters are slower and less maneuverable than thrusters, and their drivers prefer to hang back and bombard the enemy from a distance, grinning with delight at each and every concussive blast that sends an enemy sprawling.

Rippers are specialized thrusters with nasty blades mounted on the surface. They are used in quick fly-by attacks, and the ceru that fly them are among the most accomplished grav bike riders. Ripper blades are incredibly sharp and can cut through steel as easily as flesh. Once they've sliced up an opponent, the rider finishes the job with a curluk, a hand-held blade in the form of a half-circle, a favorite weapon of the ceru.

Not every ceru on the battlefield rides a grav bike. Ceru salvage crews, armed with pistols and heavily laden with tools, work to retrieve valuable technology even as the battle rages around them. These crews move on foot or in troop transports, gathering what they can from the wreckage of the fight. Battlefield salvage crews are usually made up of young ceru who have yet to earn their grav bikes or ceru whose old wounds prevent them from mounting a bike and riding into the fray. Salvage crews are capable hand-to-hand fighters, able to secure and hold strategic sites on the battlefield.

The ceru's ability to adapt and improvise serves them as well on the battlefield as it does in daily life; they are often able to repair damaged vehicles or jury-rig weapons on the spot.

A highly trained Union squad moves cautiously into unknown territory with their weapons raised and ready for action.

Union soldier with Rottweiler machine gun

Ares heavy assault suit with Lucifer cannon

Union sergeant with Pitbull rifle

Union soldier with Pitbull rifle

Union soldier with Bulldog support rifle

Two Neo-Soviet chemgrunts prepare to unleash their deadly toxic cargo.

Neo-Soviet cyclops mutant

Zykhee Ra'Gha warrior

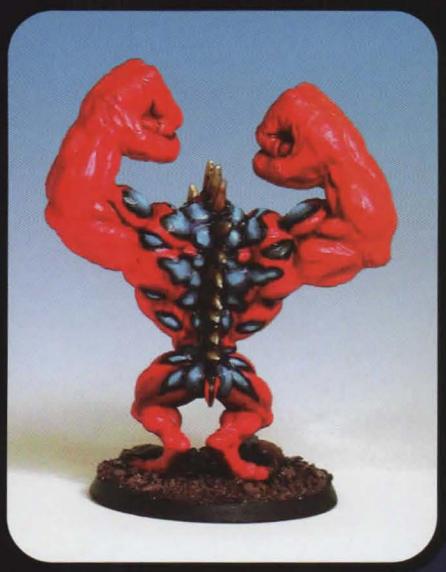
Neo-Soviet rad trooper

Neo-Soviet chemgrunt

Detail of a zykhee warrior's tattoos

A zykhee Ra'Gha warrior squad proves more than a match for the Union soldiers.

Two growler packs descend on a heavily armed Union squad.



Detail of a Razorback bull's colorful patterning

A small but effective Razorback growler pack consisting of one bull, three onehorns and three pups.

GAME CONCEPTS

This section describes basic concepts of war gaming and concepts specific to *VOR*. Once you are familiar with these concepts, you should lay out a few pieces of terrain and set up a few models so that you can try various game mechanics as you read the rest of the rules.

We made the maximum effort to make this game easy to learn and play, but at least one person in your playing group should read the rules to grasp the general idea of how things work before you start playing. *VOR*'s game mechanics are intuitive enough, however, that you can easily jump in and start playing, referring to the rules as you go for clarification on any specific questions or problems that arise.

THE GOLDEN RULE

No rulebook for a tabletop war game can cover every possible situation that may come up during a game, so it's important for players to be flexible and reasonable when working out solutions to problems. Don't let the game get bogged down in a dispute—agree on an answer to the problem that both players can accept, then after the game is finished you can discuss how the situation should be handled if it occurs again. If you can't agree on a solution after a couple of minutes of discussion, both players should roll a die; the person who gets the highest result gets his or her way. The important thing is to get past the problem as quickly as possible and get back to playing the game!

MODELS

The term model refers to any miniature used in the game, regardless of its size, shape or type. Each model has unique capabilities defined by its size, statistics and any special abilities.

FASA will produce a full line of miniatures for every force in the game. In addition, the *Custom Force Creation* rules, p. 109, describe how to use miniatures from other games to make forces appropriate for use with *VOR*.

For advice on assembling and painting models, see *Preparing Miniatures*, p. 117.

MODEL SIZES

VOR models are classified by size as small, medium or large. Each model should be on a base appropriate to its size so that it takes up the proper amount of space on the gaming table. Small and medium models both use standard 1-inch round bases. Large models use 40mm or larger round bases.

Some rules affect different sizes of models differently. The size of each model appears in the *Force Lists*, beginning on p. 120.

STATISTICS

The statistics of each model define its usefulness in the game. These characteristics represent a model's strengths and weaknesses and determine how a model interacts with other models and terrain during a game. A model's statistics range from 1–10, with an average statistic of 4. In general, the higher the stat, the more effective the model.

Move Points (MP): Move Points determine what a model can do during a turn. For example, the distance a model can move and the number of attacks it can make in a turn are both based on this stat.

Close Combat (CC): Close Combat determines a model's effectiveness in melee fighting. A model fighting unarmed or using melee weapons (for example, clubs, swords and so on) bases its attack on this stat.

Ranged Combat (RC): Ranged Combat determines a model's effectiveness in making ranged attacks. The use of all firearms and some abilities is based on this stat.

Power (POW): Power reflects the physical strength of a model. A model's Power is also the basis for the effectiveness of melee combat weapons.

Body (BOD): Body reflects how resistant a model is to injury. The higher the model's Body stat, the less likely it is to be injured by an attack.

Brains (BRN): Brains indicates the intelligence of the model, and is used to determine whether a model can understand a specific item or technology.

Guts (GUT): Guts determines a model's bravery, specifically, whether it will run in the face of danger or stay to the bitter end.

Lifeforce (LIF): The Lifeforce stat represents the number of points of damage a model can take before dying.

Armor Rating (AR): The Armor Rating represents the model's defenses. A model with enclosed power armor will have a higher AR than a model wearing normal clothing.

Point Value (PV): Every model in the game has a Point Value that reflects its effectiveness in the game. The higher the Point Value, the more effective the model.

ABILITIES

Models in *VOR* have different abilities that give them various advantages in battle. Each race has unique abilities, and certain units within a race possess specific abilities. Some abilities can be used to attack, while other defensive abilities alter a model's statistics. The description of each ability appears in the force list for that race or force, and provides all the rules needed to use the ability.

UNITS

Models are organized into units for the purposes of deployment and activation, movement, morale and certain abilities. There are two kinds of unit: individual models and squads. The force lists designate which models are deployed in squads and which models are deployed as individuals.

Individual Models

Some models deploy and fight alone on the battlefield, most often force leaders or large creatures. These are known as individual models.

Squads

A squad is a group of models that work together as a team. To represent this, the models in a squad must remain within a certain distance of each other during a battle (see *Squad Coherency,* p. 77). The term squad is used regardless of the actual organization of the models, be it a pack, horde, gang or flock.

STATISTIC TESTS

VOR uses statistic tests, or stat tests, to determine if a model succeeds in an action. For example, if a model makes a close- or ranged-combat attack, the player makes a stat test using the Close Combat or Ranged Combat statistic, respectively. In addition, many of the special abilities of the forces require an opposing model to make a stat test to resist that ability.

To make a stat test, roll D10. A stat test succeeds when the result is equal to or less than the stat being used.

Sometimes modifiers will be applied to the stat before the die is rolled. For example, a ranged combat attack is more difficult if the target is behind hard cover, so the attacker's RC is modified by –2 before the player rolls the die. Modifiers for specific kinds of actions are described in the relevant sections of the rules, and always apply only to a single test; these modifiers are never permanent.

FORCE LISTS

Each race and faction in the game has a force list, which describes the options you can choose when selecting a force. The force list details various unit types and their abilities, the number of models in each unit and the statistics and Point Values of those models. Within these restrictions, you can choose a different assortment of models to field every time you play. See p. 120 for individual force lists.

WINNING THE GAME

You can win a game of *VOR* in various ways, depending on the goals and objectives established before beginning play. In a basic game, victory is determined by Glory Points. Players receive Glory Points for destroying enemy models: at the end of the game, add together the Point Values of all the enemy models your side killed. Models removed from the game by other means, such as the use of abilities or failed morale tests, count as killed for the purpose of determining Glory Points. The side with the most Glory Points wins.

Victory in a game of *VOR* may also be based on other factors, such as achieving a specific goal, depending on the scenario being played. See the scenario guidelines in *Scenario Templates,* p. 94.

PLAYING THE GAME

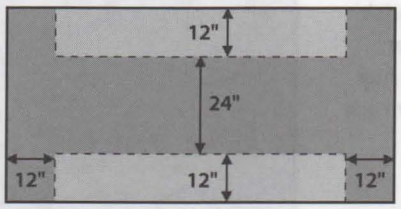
Before beginning the game, the players choose a scenario (either an original one or a scenario published by FASA) or determine victory conditions (see *Scenario Rules,* p. 93). Based on the scenario, the players determine the size of the game and choose their forces from the force lists (see *Campaign Rules,* p. 105 for suggestions for balancing forces). The players then place terrain on the playing area, deploy their forces and begin playing.

SETTING UP THE PLAYING AREA

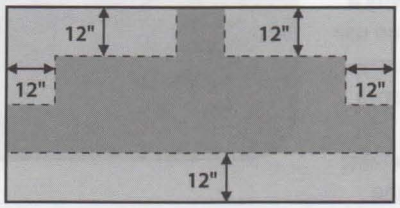
The easiest way to set up the playing area is for all players to simply place terrain on the playing area as they wish until the board is sufficiently full, then fine-tune the placement of pieces so that they work well with each other.

Alternatively, each player may roll D10. The player with the highest result places the first piece of terrain, which should be no larger than 12 x 12 inches. Then placement alternates between players (or proceeds clockwise in a multiple-player game) until a player passes on his turn to place a piece of terrain twice in a row or all players are satisfied with the playing area set-up and agree to stop placing terrain. If a player places a piece of terrain larger than 12 x 12 inches, then he misses his next turn to place terrain.

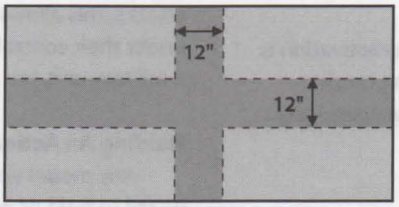
When setting up terrain, place as much terrain as possible in the main playing area and away from the table edges. Most of the action happens in the center of the table, so that is where terrain will come into play most frequently. A section of woods or a hill placed on the table edge will rarely be a factor in the game.



2 PLAYERS



3 PLAYERS



4 PLAYERS

DEPLOYMENT

Once the playing area has been set up to all players' satisfaction, you can begin putting your models into action.

First, determine where on the playing area the models will be set up. Each player will choose an area of the table, called a deployment zone, on which to set up. The size and shape of deployment zones vary depending on the size and shape of the playing area and the number of players in the game.

The number of possible variations for deployment zones makes it impractical to cover them all in these rules. As a general rule, opposing forces should set up a minimum of 24 inches apart, and the deployment zones for each player should be spaced as evenly as possible around the outside edge of the play area. The deployment diagrams show examples of various deployment zone configurations. In each case, the lightly shaded areas represent valid deployment zones.

Next, all players roll D10. The player with the highest result may choose a deployment zone. The other players then choose their deployment zones from the remaining available zones in descending order of dice roll results.

After each player has chosen a deployment zone, all players roll D10 again. The player with the highest roll can deploy a unit or may force an opponent to deploy a unit. When the first unit is deployed, players then alternate deploying their units (deployment proceeds clockwise in a multiple-player game) until all units have been placed on the board.

When deploying units, place them behind cover whenever possible, so that they begin the game with a little additional protection. In addition, keep the objectives of the scenario in mind as you place your units on the playing area. For example, if your forces must protect something, place them so that they can achieve that goal.

THE GAME TURN

Each game of *VOR: The Maelstrom* is broken down into a number of game turns. This number will vary depending on what kind of battle you're playing (standard mission, scenario and so on). For example, some games are played for a predetermined number of turns; other games are played until one side achieves a specific goal or objective. Each turn will take a varying amount of time, based on the number of units and players involved in the game.

In each turn, players roll for Initiative and activate their units. Each player may activate each unit in his force one time per turn (see *Activate Units,* p. 76). The game turn ends when all the units of all the players have been activated, and the next turn begins.

ROLL INITIATIVE

At the beginning of each turn, all players roll D10 for Initiative. The player with the highest result wins the Initiative and may choose to activate one of his units, or may force another player to activate a unit. If the player who wins Initiative chooses an opponent to activate a unit first, he may also choose the unit that player activates. Play continues with each player alternating activating a unit, until all units in the game have been activated. In a multiple-player game, play proceeds clockwise.

ACTIVATE UNITS

When a unit is activated, its component models may move, make an attack with a weapon or ability, or hold their action. A model can perform its actions in any order: for example, a model can move, attack, then move again; attack first and then move; move without making an attack; attack without moving and so on (see *Move Points* and *Holding an Action*). Each action must be resolved before the model spends any remaining MP for further actions. A model is only limited in its actions by the number of Move Points it has available.

All models within a unit must be activated before moving on to the next unit (though models may hold an action to intervene during another unit's activation, see *Holding an Action*, below). Any models that are not activated with their unit are not activated that turn.

Move Points

Move Points represent the amount of activity a model may engage in during a turn. A model can use up to its full MP each turn, unused MP do not carry over into the next turn. In order to take an action, a model must have the full MP necessary. The Activation Table lists the actions all models can take; some models may perform other actions (see the *Abilities* section of each unit type in the *Force Lists*, beginning on p. 120).

Once a model has finished spending MP, its activation is declared finished and play moves on to the next model. Once an activation is ended, the model may not spend any more MP that turn unless it held an action.

Activating A Squad

A squad may be activated as a group or as individual models. All players must agree on the form of activation to be used in the game before beginning play, and all players must use that form of activation for their squads for the entire game.

Individual Activation: When using individual activation, you activate one model at a time as in the standard rules. Because this method allows you to fine-tune your strategy, individual activation of a squad offers the player tactical advantages. However, activating each member of a squad individually will slow down play in large-scale games.

Group Activation: When a squad is activated as a group, the player must announce the number of MP the squad will use for movement (including jumping and standing). All models in the squad spend that MP regardless if they move the full distance. For example, if a player announces that his squad will spend 4 MP on movement, each model in the squad must spend 4 MP on movement, even if some models move less than 4 inches or do not move at all. Each model still moves, attacks and so on one at a time. Group activation speeds up game play because every model in a squad will have a standard amount of MP to use for movement, and therefore the same amount left to use for attacks. This allows players to deal quickly with many squads under their control and accurately represents the behavior of a military unit, but the player loses some strategic flexibility.

ACTIVATION TABLE

Action	Move Points
Movement	1 inch/MP
Hold an action	All MP (see *Holding an Action*, below)
Use weapon/ability	See MPC in *Force Lists*, p. 120
Aim	1/2 ranged attack MP cost, round up
Unarmed melee attack	3 MP/attack (4 MP for large models)
Move out of melee	1 MP
Jump	4 MP
Stand up	3 MP
Enter/exit vehicle	1 MP
Moving in Structures	
Moving between levels	1 MP per inch of distance between levels
Climbing buildings or terrain	1 MP per inch of height of obstacle
Turn Cost (vehicles only)	
Light vehicles	1 MP
Medium Vehicles	2 MP
Heavy vehicles	3 MP

Holding An Action

Any model with an MP stat of 8 or more may spend all its MP to hold its action in a turn. A model holding its action may not spend MP on anything else that turn, except intervening (see below). A model may continue to hold its action for subsequent turns, spending all its MP each turn to remain on hold.

A model holding its action receives 5 MP that it can use to *intervene* at any time, even during an opponent's turn or in the middle of an enemy unit's activation or movement. This is most useful for waiting until a target appears from behind cover and immediately attacking it. When the holding model intervenes, play is temporarily interrupted until the holding model completes its action. Play then resumes normally.

Models that intervene may only make ranged combat attacks or receive a charge (see p. 80). Intervening models may not move, melee attack or spend MP for any other purpose.

If using the group activation rule, the entire squad must intervene at the same time.

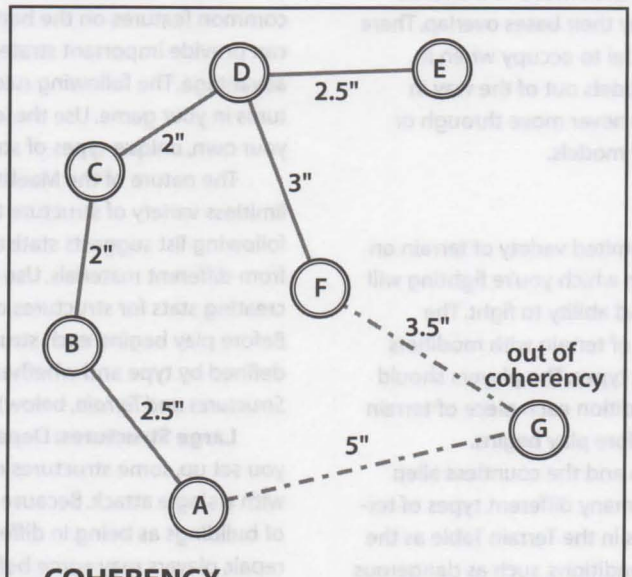
Modify by –1 ranged combat attacks made by models that were holding their action.

MOVEMENT

A model moves by spending Move Points. Each MP spent on movement allows the model to move 1 inch in any direction. Terrain and other special effects modify the MP cost of movement per inch.

If a model moves a fraction of an inch, it costs the same MP as a full inch of movement. For example, a model that moves 3.5 inches through open terrain would spend 4 MP.

Models may "stagger" their movement in order to move around obstacles. When a model moves in this manner, total the distance it has moved before rounding off fractions. For example, if a model in open terrain moves 2.25" in one direction, and then another 3.5" in another in order to get around a corner, its total movement would be 5.75", rounded to 6" (costing 6 MP).

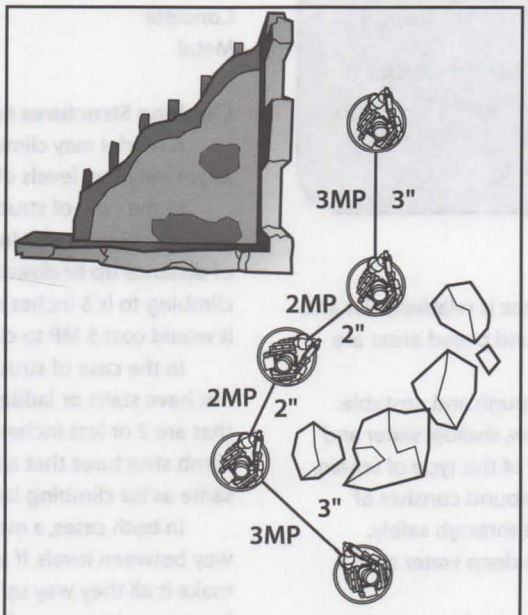


COHERENCY
Model G is more than 3" away from any other member of his squad, so he is considered "out of coherency." The rest of the models in the squad are in coherency.

MODEL PLACEMENT

A model's exact position on the battlefield is the basis for weapons range, squad coherency and the effects of that unit's or another unit's ranged attacks and special abilities. Because of this, you should not remove a model from the battlefield during the game unless absolutely necessary. If you must remove a model during the game, mark its place with a die or some other item so that you can replace it as close as possible to its original position when you return it to the table.

At the end of a model's movement, the controlling player may place it facing any desired direction (except see *Vehicles*, p. 89). A model is normally considered to be facing the direction in which its head is pointed. If a model's pose makes it difficult to determine its facing, the controlling player may designate the model's facing. If the controlling player fails to announce what part of the model will determine its facing, the opponent may choose what part of the model will determine its facing for the remainder of the current game.



MOVING AROUND OBSTACLES

SQUAD COHERENCY

Squads fight together as a team, and as such the component models of a squad must stay close enough together to effectively communicate and coordinate their attacks. If members of a squad lag behind or get separated from the squad, it weakens the entire squad's ability to perform and increases the likelihood of the models becoming disoriented or panicked.

Unless otherwise noted, all squads have a 3-inch coherency; in other words, each member of the squad must be within 3 inches of one other remaining member of the squad. During a squad's activation, models may temporarily break coherency. Players need only check the coherency of a squad after the squad has been activated and the movement of all its models is finished. If one or more models within a squad exceed the squad's coherency at this point, the squad must make a Morale Test or become panicked (see *Morale*, p. 88).

If only one model from a squad survives on the battlefield (the rest of the squad has been eliminated), it does not have to make Morale Tests for breaking coherency.

Melee Combat Exception: Models in base-to-base contact and in melee combat with an enemy model do not need to maintain coherency. As soon as the model breaks from close com-

bat or ends the fight, however, it must regain coherency, so it is to the squad's advantage to maintain coherency at all times.

MOVING THROUGH MODELS

Models may move through the space occupied by friendly models, but may not end their move in the same space as any other model, nor may their bases overlap. There must be space available for a model to occupy when it moves—you can't move other models out of the way in order to make room. Models may never move through or occupy the same space as enemy models.

TERRAIN

The Maelstrom offers an unlimited variety of terrain on which to fight. The terrain type on which you're fighting will affect your model's movement and ability to fight. The Terrain Table suggests four types of terrain with modifiers for moving through those terrain types. The players should designate the type of terrain condition each piece of terrain in the playing area represents before play begins.

The nature of the Maelstrom and the countless alien worlds contained within it make many different types of terrain possible. Use the suggestions in the Terrain Table as the basis for creating other terrain conditions, such as dangerous levels of radiation, low gravity and so on. For examples of more terrain features, consult the *Battle Terrain Table*, p. 97.

TERRAIN TABLE

Terrain Condition	Modifier
Open	No modifiers
Broken	2 MP per inch. No wheeled vehicles.
Hazardous	3 MP per inch. No wheeled or tracked vehicles.
Impassable	Flying movement only.

Terrain Table Notes

Open Terrain: This common surface is relatively flat and stable. Grassy fields, hard-packed dirt, and paved areas are representative of this type of terrain.

Broken Terrain: Broken terrain is rough and unstable. Areas of rocky terrain, deep sand or snow, shallow water and dense ground vegetation are examples of this type of terrain.

Hazardous Terrain: Hazardous ground consists of terrain that is very difficult to navigate through safely. Examples of hazardous terrain include deep water and heavy rubble.

Impassable Terrain: Often the result of heavy fighting, impassable terrain is commonly found on battlefields where the engines of war have deeply scarred the terrain and reduced to heavy rubble any structures in the area. Impassable terrain also includes sheer cliffs, deep gorges, rushing rivers and so on.

BATTLEFIELD STRUCTURES

Burned-out, blasted and twisted structures are common features on the battlefields of the Maelstrom and can provide important strategic benefits if used to their best advantage. The following rules suggest ways of using structures in your game. Use these as a basis for creating rules for your own, unique types of structures.

The nature of the Maelstrom makes possible an almost limitless variety of structure types and composition. The following list suggests statistics for buildings constructed from different materials. Use these suggestions as a basis for creating stats for structures of other, and unique, materials. Before play begins, each structure in the play area should be defined by type and whether it can be climbed (see *Climbing Structures and Terrain*, below).

Large Structures: Depending on the type of terrain you set up, some structures may be too large to be destroyed with a single attack. Because it is difficult to designate parts of buildings as being in different conditions or states of repair, players may agree before beginning the game to designate certain large structures as immune to damage.

Structure Type	Statistics
Wood	BOD 5
Brick/Clay	BOD 6
Crystal	BOD 6, AR 3
Bio-Organic	BOD 7
Concrete	BOD 7, AR 3
Metal	BOD 8, AR 5

Climbing Structures and Terrain

A model may climb on low buildings or obstacles or move between levels of buildings.

In the case of structures with visible staircases or ladders, climbing or moving between levels costs 1 MP per inch of distance up or down. For example, if the level a model is climbing to is 5 inches above the level it currently occupies, it would cost 5 MP to climb to that level.

In the case of structures or sheer-sided terrain that does not have stairs or ladders, small models can climb structures that are 2 or less inches high. Medium and large models can climb structures that are 3 or less inches high. The cost is the same as for climbing ladders or stairs.

In both cases, a model cannot end its movement halfway between levels. If a model does not have enough MP to make it all they way up or down to a level or platform where it can stand, it cannot begin the climb at all.

SPECIAL MOVEMENT

Models can do more than just walk around when they move across the playing area. The following rules cover standing up after being knocked down, jumping and falling (for MP Costs, see the Activation Table, p. 76).

STANDING UP FROM PRONE

A prone model is one that is lying on the ground. When a model is knocked prone (see *Knockdowns,* p. 80), place it on its side centered on where it was standing. Unless otherwise noted by an ability, a prone model cannot spend MP for any reason while it is prone except to stand up or hold an action. It costs 3 MP to stand up from a prone position. Models may not intentionally go prone unless an ability states otherwise.

JUMPING

For a cost of 4 MP, a model may jump a distance up to 2 inches horizontally and 1 inch vertically during its movement. The model must make a Knockdown Test (see p. 80) when it lands from a jump. A model that fails this roll lands prone, but is not injured. After a jump, the model may continue to jump or use other movement as long as it has MP available (though it would have to stand up first if it fell down).

FALLING

A model that gets knocked off or chooses to jump from a ledge or other high terrain feature must roll D10 to determine if it lands prone. On a result equal to or less than the number of inches the model fell, the model lands prone and takes a hit with a Power equal to the distance fallen in inches. The model cannot make an Armor Test to avoid damage. The falling model takes 1 point of damage for each full 6 inches that it fell (with a minimum of 1 point).

Falling Onto Another Model: If a model falls or jumps onto another model, both models take a hit as described above. If a model falls on a vehicle, the vehicle takes no damage, but the falling model takes a hit. However, if a large model falls on a light vehicle, both take damage as described above.

COMBAT

There are two types of attacks available to models in *VOR:* close combat and ranged combat. Close combat (or melee) fighting is when you get up close and personal with your opponent and attack using your fists, a sword, a staff, a bayonet and so on. Ranged combat involves attacking your adversaries from afar with some sort of missile weapon, from guns to energy blasts to thrown rocks and so on.

GENERAL RULES

The following rules apply to both ranged and close combat.

CRITICAL HITS AND MISSES

A result of 1 on an attack to-hit roll is a critical hit. This means the attack automatically hits, and the target of the attack cannot make an Armor Test to avoid the damage.

A result of 10 on an attack to-hit roll is a critical miss. The attack automatically misses, and the attacking model loses any remaining MP for that turn.

The critical hits and misses rule applies to both close and ranged combat.

USING WEAPONS AND ABILITIES

To use a weapon or ability in combat, the statistics of a weapon or ability are used in place of the wielder's own stats unless noted otherwise.

KNOCKDOWNS

Some weapons and abilities may force a model to make a Knockdown Test. Roll D10; on a result of 5 or less, the model is knocked down and goes prone. This is referred to as being knocked down. If a weapon indicates a modifier for knockdown (written as Knockdown +3, for example), add the modifier to 5 before making the Knockdown Test. The result of the Knockdown Test must be equal to or less than that number.

Knocked down models are more vulnerable to melee attacks (see *Prone Models,* p. 79).

RANGED COMBAT

Ranged attacks are attacks made using any weapons and/or abilities that allow a model to affect an enemy model that is not in base-to-base contact with it. Use the following steps to make a ranged-combat attack.

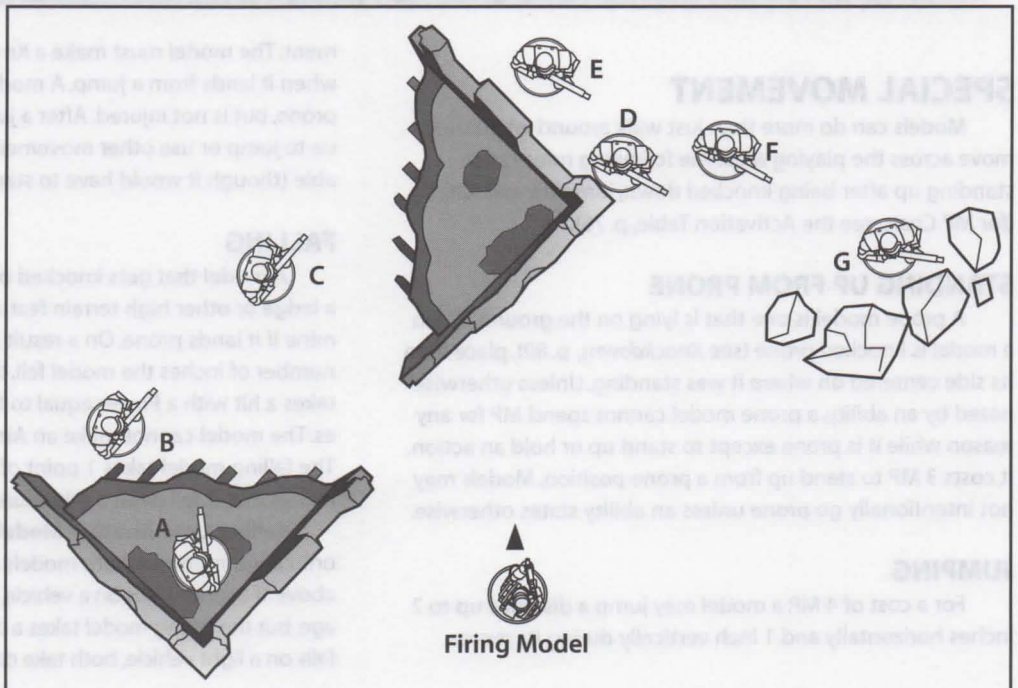
1. Subtract the weapon/ability's MP Cost.
2. Choose a target for the attack.
3. Determine the range to the target.
4. Apply modifiers to the attack.
5. Roll D10 to hit.
6. Determine damage.

1. SUBTRACT MP

Each ranged attack weapon and ability has an MP Cost (MPC) that indicates how many MP the model must spend to use the weapon/ability in an attack. When used, subtract this cost from the model's remaining MP this turn. See the weapon/ability descriptions in *Force Lists* (p. 120) for MP Costs.

2. CHOOSE A TARGET

When choosing a valid target, the target must be within line of sight (unless it is an indirect attack, see p. 85) and



LINE OF SIGHT

Models A,C,D, F and G are in the firing model's LOS. Because only half of their bodies are visible to the firing model, models A, D, and G are considered "in cover" from the firing model's point of view. Models B and E are not visible to the firing model at all.

within the model's firing arc. Additionally, enemy models that are within immediate proximity must be targeted.

Some attacks affect an area rather than a single target model. See *Attack Templates* (p. 84) for determining the results of such attacks.

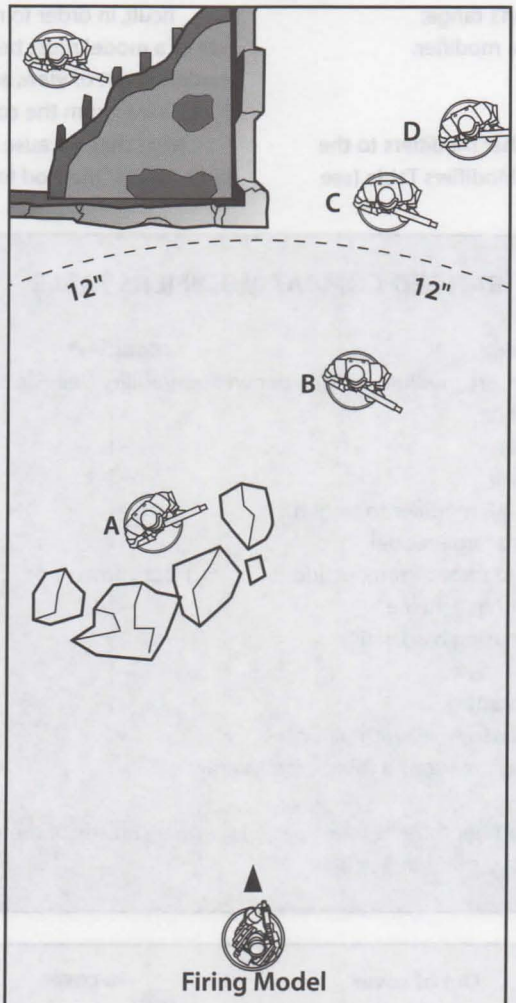
Splitting Fire: A unit can fire at up to two different targets during the course of its activation. An enemy squad counts as a single target for these purposes.

Line of Sight

In order to make a ranged combat attack, the attacking model must be able to see the intended target. If it can see the target, it is said to have line of sight (LOS) to the target. The player need only look toward the intended target from the attacking miniature's perspective to determine if the target can be seen. This can best be done by crouching down to get a "miniature's-eye view" of the battlefield. If this is not possible, use a straightedge. For this purpose, a thin wooden dowel or a narrow but sturdy tape measure is best, because you may need to poke the straightedge through woods or other tight spaces to check for LOS. A high-tech alternative is to use a laser pointer to check line of sight, but such tools are fairly expensive.

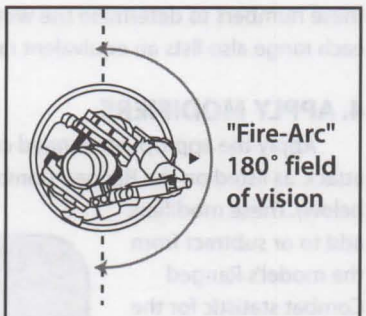
LOS should be sighted from the torso of the attacking model (looking over its shoulders), not its feet or the tip of its head. If any portion of the model to be attacked is visible to the firing model, there is LOS. Note that a model isn't frozen in the pose in which it was sculpted, so if a model's limbs are extended very high or wide away from the model, for example, they should not count for LOS. Using the model's base as a guide, consider the model to be encased in an imaginary dome extending from the base to the top of the model's head; anything outside this dome should not count for LOS.

Obviously, the players' must exercise fair judgment to determine LOS when conflicts occur. If the players cannot agree whether LOS exists or not, roll a die to resolve the conflict and keep the game moving.



CHOOSING TARGETS

The firing model may shoot at model A or model B. Model A is behind cover, so the attacker may choose to shoot at model B instead. The other models are not valid targets because they are too far away or are not in the attacker's LOS.



FIRING ARC

A model has the potential to see and attack anything in its forward 180° field of vision (depending on terrain, etc). This is referred to as a model's firing arc.

Firing Arc

Models can see anything that lies in front of them within an arc of 180 degrees, called a firing arc. This field of vision determines the targets against which a model can use ranged weapons and abilities. A model's firing arc lies 90 degrees to either side of a center line based on the model's front (the direction of the model's facing). For models that don't have an obvious facing, you can mark the edge of the base to designate the center of the model's firing arc.

Immediate Proximity

If there is an enemy model within 12 inches of the attacking model and in line of sight, then the model must attack the closest such model when making a ranged attack. Models within 12 inches that have cover (p. 82) can be ignored in favor of models within 12 inches that are in the open.

If no enemy models are within 12 inches of the attacking model, it may fire at any enemy model to which it has LOS and that is within range.

3. DETERMINE RANGE

Measure the distance between the attacking model and the target, from base to base. Each weapon and ability lists short (S), medium (M) and long (L) ranges in their individual descriptions (see *Force Lists*, p. 120). Compare the distance to

these numbers to determine the weapon's range; each range also lists an equivalent range modifier.

4. APPLY MODIFIERS

Apply the appropriate ranged combat modifiers to the attack, as listed on the Ranged Combat Modifiers Table (see below). These modifiers add to or subtract from the model's Ranged Combat statistic for the current attack only.

Targets to whom LOS is partially blocked may receive the benefits of cover (see below).

Aimed Shots

For an additional MP Cost equal to half the MP Cost of the ranged attack (round down, to a minimum 2 MP), any model making a ranged attack may aim its shot. Modify the Ranged Combat statistic by +1 for an aimed shot. A single attack may only be aimed once; additional MP expenditure will not increase the Ranged Combat stat by more than +1.

RANGED COMBAT MODIFIERS TABLE

Condition	Modifier*
Range (short, medium, long)	per weapon/ability (see *Force Lists*)
Aimed shot	+1
Soft cover	–1
Hard cover	–2
(+1 AR modifier to target)	
Target is a large model	+1
Firing into melee from outside	–1 per combatant
Firing within a melee	–1
Attacker using held action	–1
Indirect attack	–1
Full-auto attack	–1
Target is paralyzed with panic	+2
Targeting the ground (blast attacks only)	–1

* This number modifies the Ranged Combat statistic of the attacker for the current attack only.

5. ROLL D10 TO HIT

On a result equal to or less than the attacking model's modified Ranged Combat statistic, the attack hits. A roll of 1 is always a critical hit, a roll of 10 is always a critical miss (see p. 80).

6. DETERMINE DAMAGE

If the attack hits, the target may be injured or even killed. See *Damage*, p. 87.

Unless the weapon/ability is subject to scattering, or the target is engaged in melee, a missed shot has no effect on the game. See *Blast Template*, p. 84, for weapons/abilities that scatter and for shooting into melee.

COVER

Some terrain will not block line of sight, but might provide a model some cover, making attacks against it more difficult. In order to receive the benefits of cover, at least half of a model must be behind cover from the attacking model's point of view, and the model may not be more than 1 inch away from the cover.

Note that because some models have strange poses, the same "dome" method for determining LOS should be used to determine cover.

If a situation arises in which it is difficult to determine whether a model has cover, the easiest solution is to assume the model has cover. If the players cannot agree on this, then each opponent should roll D10, with the player who rolled the higher result choosing whether the model has cover. Alternatively, a neutral third party can make the call as long as the players agree to accept that person's judgment.

Cover comes in two general varieties: soft cover and hard cover. Although the distinction between them is clear in most cases, any terrain in the play area that might fall between the categories should be designated as soft or hard before play begins.

Soft Cover

Any cover that makes it more difficult to shoot at a model, but doesn't slow down or stop the attack, is considered soft cover. Soft cover breaks up the outline of the targeted model, but is not big or tough enough to stop the shot. Bushes, piles of leaves and stacks of cardboard boxes are examples of soft cover.

Modify the attacker's Ranged Combat statistic by –1 for soft cover.

Hard Cover

Hard cover is heavy terrain that completely obscures a target's outline and/or prevents a shot from penetrating the terrain feature. Ruined walls, steel barricades, and bunkers are good examples of hard cover.

Modify the attacker's Ranged Combat statistic by –2 for hard cover, and add +1 to the target's Armor Rating. This armor bonus represents the stopping power of the cover.

FIRING INTO MELEE

A model firing into a melee from the outside risks hitting a model other than its target.

For each model involved in the melee, modify the attacker's Ranged Combat statistic by –1. For example, a model fires into a melee combat involving a large growler and a human. If the model is targeting the human, modify the attacker's Ranged Combat by –2 for the two combatants. If the model is targeting the large growler, the modifier will be –1 (–2 for two combatants, +1 for a large target).

If an attack misses its target, roll D10. On a result of 5 or less, a different, randomly determined model in the melee is attacked instead. Roll to hit and resolve the attack normally as though the attacker had tried to hit the new target. If this second target is missed, the attack misses entirely.

RANGED ATTACK TEMPLATES

Some attacks affect an area rather than a single model, as noted in the *Mode* entries in the *Force Lists* (see p. 120). The area of effect for such attacks are determined by templates as described below.

Blast Template

The blast template is the round template supplied in the game. The template is marked in half-inch increments to indicate different-sized areas of effect. Attacks that use the blast template explode with concussive force. Such attacks automatically force all models in the affected area to make Knockdown Tests.

To use the blast template to resolve a successful attack, center the template over the target model by placing the X in the center of the template at the point of impact. Any model whose base is touched by the radius of the blast is hit by the attack. For example, if an attack has a blast radius of 2 inches, the template would be centered on the point of impact, and every model whose base fell under the template out to the 2-inch mark would be hit by the attack.

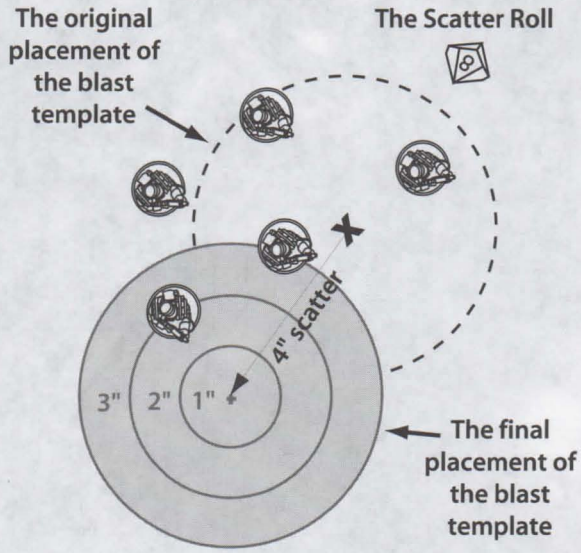
Each attack that uses a blast radius has a unique radius, listed with the description of the attack.

Weapons that use a blast template are the only ones powerful enough to damage structures (see *Damaging Structures,* p. 87).

Scattering

When an attack that uses a blast template misses, the effect scatters. To determine the distance and direction of a scatter, roll D10, landing the die as close to the point of impact as possible. The arrow shape of the D10 indicates the direction of the scatter, starting from the missed target point (not the die). The attack scatters for a number of inches equal to the result of the die roll halved (round up).

Targeting the Ground: You may want to aim a blast-radius weapon between several enemy models in order to catch them all within the template of the blast. In this case, you are targeting the ground, which adds a –1 modifier to the attacker's Ranged Combat statistic.



SCATTER DIAGRAM

An attack using a blast template has missed. The scatter roll is an 8, which means that the blast template will move 4" (8 ÷ 2 = 4) in the direction indicated by the arrowhead shape of the scatter die.

Splash Template

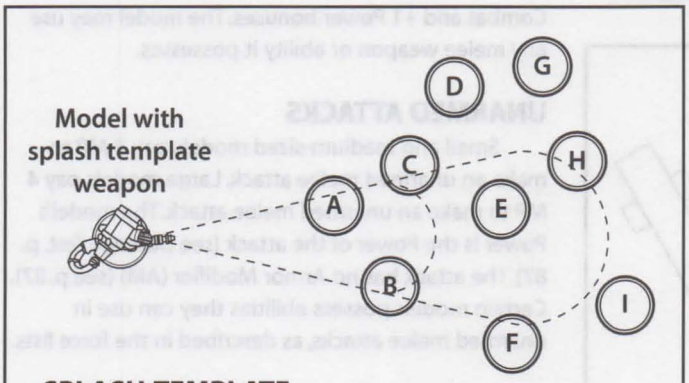
The cone-shaped splash template included in the game is divided into a small and large cone. Any model whose base is touched by the small cone area of the template is automatically hit by the attack. For models whose bases are touched by the large cone of the splash template, roll D10. On a result of 5 or less, the attack hits the model.

To use the splash template to resolve an attack, place the small end (the tip of the template) touching the outside edge of the attacking model's base, with the large end pointing out into the attacking model's fire arc (see diagram on p. 85).

Zone Template

The rectangular-shaped zone template is used to resolve attacks made with full-auto fire and with special abilities that have a similar area of effect.

To use the zone template to resolve an attack, place the template anywhere within the attacking model's firing arc and LOS, within the range of the weapon. The template must be oriented so that the arrow on the template points directly away from the attacking model.

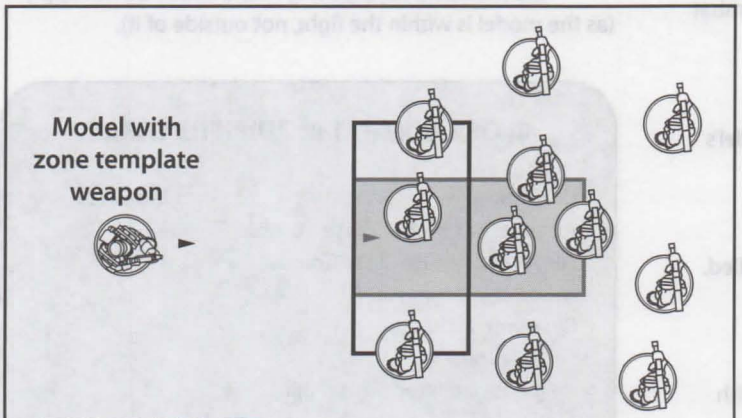


SPLASH TEMPLATE

Models A, B and C are automatically hit by the splash attack because they are touched by the smaller cone area of the template. Models E, F and H are caught in the splash attack on a D10 roll of 5 or less. Models D, G, and I are not effected.

When attacking a squad, the template must be placed so the model closest to the attacker in the squad is affected.

Models whose bases are under the template are attacked a number of times based on their size: small, 1 hit; medium, 2 hits; large, 3 hits. Each attack requires a Ranged Combat Test as normal.



ZONE TEMPLATE

The small arrow on the edge of the zone template should be pointing the same way the attacking model is facing. If a model using a zone template weapon is on higher ground than its target, you may turn the template on its side to affect models placed deep in enemy ranks (as shown above).

FIRING FULL-AUTO

Once per turn, a model armed with a full-auto weapon may attack using full-auto fire, at the same MP cost as the weapon's standard attack. Use the zone template and determine whether the shots hit and injure the target or bypass armor as normal. Full-auto shots ignore soft cover and may never be aimed. Modify Ranged Combat by –1 for full-auto attacks.

INDIRECT ATTACKS

Some ranged weapons and abilities can be used to make indirect attacks, launching their effects up and over intervening obstacles in the manner of mortars and thrown grenades. An indirect attack allows a model to attack a target to which it does not have LOS; instead, any friendly model must have line of sight to the target.

A weapon can only be used to make an indirect attack at short or medium range. Indirect attacks cannot be made as an aimed shot, and modify the attacker's Ranged Combat by –1. All indirect attacks use the blast template to determine the area of effect of their shot. Where noted, models may make a Dodge Test (p. 87) to avoid an indirect attack.

Grenades: Grenades can be thrown blind at a target or target area; in other words, thrown indirectly without any friendly model having LOS to the target. Grenades thrown blind can only be thrown at short range, but such an attack can be made as an aimed shot (at short range, a model is close enough to the target to accurately guess its location by listening for movement or using detection equipment).

CLOSE COMBAT

Use the following steps to make a close-combat (melee) attack.

1. SUBTRACT THE MP COST

Each melee weapon and ability has an MP Cost (MPC) that indicates how many MP the model must spend to use the weapon/ability in an attack. When used, subtract this cost from the model's remaining MP this turn. See the weapon/ability descriptions in *Force Lists* (p. 120) for MP Costs.

Unarmed models pay 3 MP to make an unarmed melee attack. Large models pay 4 MP to make an unarmed melee attack.

2. CHOOSE A TARGET

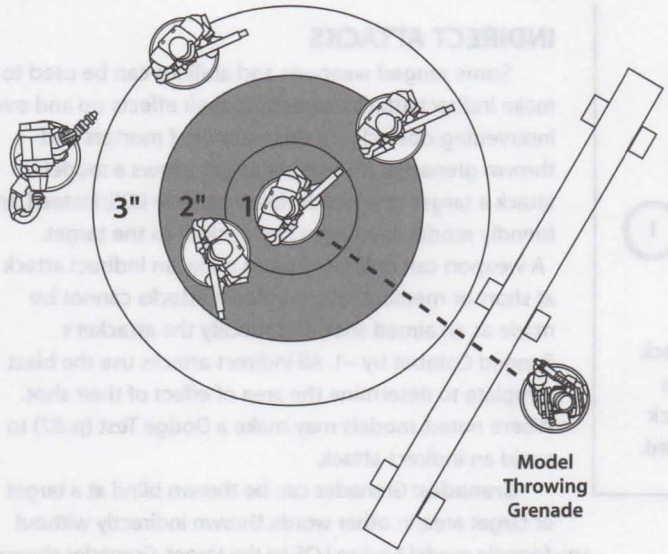
A model must be in base-to-base contact with an opposing model in order to make a melee attack against that model.

3. COMPARE CLOSE COMBAT STATISTICS

Determine whose CC is higher: the attacker or the target's. Modify the attacker's Close Combat by +1 if the attacker has a higher Close Combat. Modify attacker's Close Combat by –1 if the target has a higher Close Combat.

4. ADD OTHER MODIFIERS

Apply any other appropriate modifiers to the attack, as listed on the Close Combat Modifiers Table (p. 86). These



GRENADE ATTACK

The model behind the wall is attempting to throw a grenade at the models on the other side. He receives –1 RC for the attack because he doesn't have LOS to his intended targets.

modifiers add to or subtract from the model's Close Combat statistic for the current attack only.

5. ROLL D10 TO HIT

On a result equal to or less than the attacking model's Close Combat statistic, the attack hits.

6. DETERMINE DAMAGE

If the attack hits, the target may be wounded or killed. See *Damage*, p. 87.

CHARGING

If a model has moved into base-to-base contact with the target during the same turn that it is making a melee attack, it has charged and receives a +1 modifier to its Close Combat. This bonus only applies during the turn that you move into contact with the enemy model; melee attacks against that model during subsequent turns do not receive this bonus unless the attacking model moves out of base-to-base contact and then moves in again.

Receiving a Charge

If a model with a held action is charged, that model will lose its held action once the charge attack occurs. The holding may opt to intervene and make one free melee attack against the charging model once base-to-base contact is made. This attack costs no MP, but uses up the model's held action. The model receiving the charge also gets +1 Close Combat and +1 Power bonuses. The model may use any melee weapon or ability it possesses.

UNARMED ATTACKS

Small and medium-sized models pay 3 MP to make an unarmed melee attack. Large models pay 4 MP to make an unarmed melee attack. The model's Power is the Power of the attack (see *Damage Test*, p. 87). The attack has no Armor Modifier (AM) (see p. 87). Certain models possess abilities they can use in unarmed melee attacks, as described in the force lists.

ARMED ATTACKS

Any weapon or ability designated as a melee attack may be used in melee combat. The attack's Power is used instead of the model's POW (though sometimes Power is based on a modified POW, see *Power*, p. 120).

Ranged weapons and abilities may not be used in melee combat, unless the attack is designated as *Point Blank* in its *Mode* entry (see *Force Lists*, p. 120). When using a ranged weapon in melee combat, it is fired at short range using the Ranged Combat statistic and may only be used to attack an enemy model in base-to-base contact. The attack receives a –1 modifier, but the modifiers for shooting into a melee do not apply (as the model is within the fight, not outside of it).

CLOSE COMBAT MODIFIERS TABLE

Condition	Modifier*
Attacker has higher Close Combat	+1
Target has higher Close Combat	–1
Attacker charging	+1
Receiving a charge	+1
Target prone	+2
Target is paralyzed with panic	+2

* This number modifies the Close Combat statistic of the attacker for the current attack only.

Parrying

Certain melee weapons allow the wielder to parry close combat attacks (whether the attack is unarmed, armed or using an ability). When an attacker makes a successful melee attack, a target who can parry rolls D10. On a result less than the result of the attacker's to-hit roll, the model deflects the blow.

Parrying does not cost MP. Prone models may not parry.

MOVING OUT OF MELEE COMBAT

It costs 1 MP to attempt to move out of melee combat with an enemy model (in addition to movement MP costs if successful). When a model attempts this, each player rolls D10 and adds their model's Power to the roll, re-rolling any ties. If the model attempting to break contact gets the higher result, it successfully breaks contact and moves away from its current position in any direction (paying normal movement MP costs). If the enemy model rolls higher, the model attempting to break contact fails to do so and automatically takes a hit from the enemy model with whom it is in base-to-base contact. Damage is determined according to the standard rules.

For a model attempting to break contact with more than one opposing model, each enemy model rolls a D10 and adds their Power. Every one that rolls higher than the fleeing model scores an automatic hit. If the fleeing model gets a higher result than all of them, it breaks away. Ties are only re-rolled by the models that tied.

DAMAGE

Once you have made a successful attack against an enemy model, you must determine if the attack damaged it. The target model first makes an Armor Test to shrug off the attack; in some cases target models may dodge an attack as well. If this fails, a Damage Test is made to determine if the target is actually injured by the hit.

Unless noted otherwise, all attacks inflict only 1 point of damage.

A model is killed when it suffers a number of points of damage that equals or exceeds its Lifeforce stat.

ARMOR TEST

A model with an Armor Rating (AR) rolls D10 to avoid the effects of a hit. On a result equal to or less than the model's Armor Rating, the model does not take damage.

Certain weapons and abilities are particularly effective against armor, and have an armor modifier (AM) that temporarily reduces a target's Armor Rating for that particular Armor Test.

DODGE TEST

Certain weapons and abilities produce effects that may be dodged (this will be specified in the description of the weapon or ability). A model may try to avoid such an effect by making a Dodge Test. To make a Dodge Test, the player rolls D10 and adds +1 for each point of Close Combat the model has above 5. On a modified result of 6 or higher, the model has successfully dodged the attack or effect.

If a model fails a Dodge Test, or successfully dodges an effect that does not use a template, the model remains in place. If the model successfully dodged a template effect, place the model at the edge of the template nearest to the model's position before the dodge. If it is unclear which edge is closest, the owner of the model gets to choose.

DAMAGE TEST

The base target number to inflict damage is 5.

If the attack has a higher Power than the Body of the target, it will be more likely to inflict damage. If the attack's Power is lower, it will be less likely to inflict damage. Subtract the Body of the target from the Power of the attack. Apply the result as a modifier to the target number of 5. If the attack's Power is higher than the target's Body, then the modifier will be positive (+). If the attack's Power is lower than the target's Body, then the modifier will be negative (–).

For example, using a ranged weapon that has Power 5, you hit an enemy model. The enemy model has a Body of 4. The difference between the weapon's Power and target's Body is 1 (5 – 4 = 1), which means you add a +1 modifier to the Damage Test's target number of 5. As a result, a roll of 6 or less on a D10 (5 + 1 = 6) would successfully injure the target.

If you use a ranged weapon that has Power 5 and hit an enemy model with a Body of 7, the difference between the weapon's Power and target's Body is –2 (5 – 7 = –2). This modifies the target number of 5 by –2, which means that a roll of 3 or less on a D10 (5 – 2 = 3) would successfully injure the target.

DAMAGING STRUCTURES

Battlefield structures exist in one of three conditions: stable, unstable and destroyed. Unless otherwise noted, at the start of a game all structures are in stable condition.

Structures can be damaged by any weapon that uses the blast template (see *Blast Template*, p. 84), or by abilities that specifically state they can damage structures. Whenever a model makes a successful attack against a structure, determine damage according to the standard injury rules. Structures with Armor Ratings ignore all weapon attack armor modifiers, though critical hits still apply.

Each point of damage inflicted by the attack reduces the condition of a structure by one level (i.e.; from stable to unstable, or unstable to destroyed). Weapons that inflict more than 1 point of damage may destroy a structure in a single attack. When a structure is destroyed it should be removed from play, or replaced with rubble pieces if you have the appropriate terrain.

Models Caught in Destroyed Structures

Models occupying a structure when it's destroyed are automatically hit by an attack of a Power equal to the Body of the structure. If this attack causes damage, the model is killed regardless of how much Lifeforce it had remaining. Models that survive a structure being destroyed around them should be placed prone on the table as close as possible to their original position prior to the structure being destroyed, and facing in a randomly determined direction.

MORALE

In the deadly and unpredictable battlefields of the Maelstrom, even the most seasoned soldiers may fall victim to panic. Units will break apart and flee from the fight for any number of reasons, but most often from heavy casualties. A commander involved in a conflict resulting in heavy casualties may find panic rippling through his ranks, and could eventually lose his entire force. It is during these difficult engagements that leadership and bravery are most required.

MORALE TEST

At the point when a squad is reduced to 50 percent or less of its starting number of members, or an individual model is reduced to 50 percent or less of its starting Lifeforce, it must immediately make a Morale Test. To make a Morale Test, roll D10. If the result is equal to or less than the Guts statistic of the models in the unit, the unit has kept its nerve and play continues. On a result higher than the Guts stat, the unit panics.

As noted in the *Force Lists,* some units have a special ability that allows them to use the Guts statistic of a leader or other model when making a Morale Test.

If a squad contains a named model (see p. 108) who has a higher Guts statistic than the other models in the squad, use the named model's Guts for the Morale Test (unless a leader is present, in which case use the highest Guts).

Large Squads: To represent the difficulty of controlling larger units, squads containing 8 or more models must make an additional Morale Test when their squad is reduced to 75 percent of its starting size. For example, a squad consisting of 8 models would make a Morale Test as soon as it was reduced to 6 models, and a second Morale Test upon being reduced to 4 models. It is possible for large squads to be reduced by half twice in the same turn or even in the same attack, requiring two Morale Tests.

PANICKED UNITS

Units that panic on the battlefield act in bizarre and unpredictable ways and are no longer fully under the control of the player. Skilled players can learn to anticipate such situations and create fallback plans. To determine the actions of a panicked unit, roll D10 and consult the Panic Table.

PANIC TABLE

Die Roll Result	Reaction
1–2	**Paralyzed!** The unit is immobilized with fear and uncertainty and can do nothing for one turn. When the unit is next activated it can do nothing except recover its nerve; no MP may be spent by this unit for any reason, nor may they parry or dodge. Apply a +2 modifier to the RC or CC of any attacks against a paralyzed unit until after its next activation.
3–9	**Pushed back!** The unit is forced to move away from their current position. When the unit is next activated, it must use all its available MP (each model's MP, in the case of a squad) to move toward its deployment zone. If there is an enemy unit between the unit and its deployment zone, it moves toward the nearest available cover instead. If the unit is surrounded and there is no obvious direction in which to flee, use the rules for scatter (see *Scattering,* p. 84) to determine the direction in which the unit must move. On its next activation after the pushed-back move, the unit may be used as normal.
10	**Broken!** The squad scatters and takes no further part in this battle. Remove the remaining models of the squad from the playing area and consider them all casualties for purposes of determining Glory Points. For an individual model, treat this result as Pushed Back.

VEHICLE RULES

In *VOR*, vehicles are used on the battlefield for mobility, transport, or as weapon platforms. Nearly all races trapped in the Maelstrom use vehicles to some degree. The extreme diversity of terrain in the Maelstrom restricts most traditional vehicle designs to limited use; as a result, many races altered most of their standard designs to be more efficient in this hostile new domain. Vehicles are usually designed for a specific combat role, and their relatively durable construction increases the length of time they can remain on the field.

This section provides the basic vehicle rules for *VOR: The Maelstrom*. Future products will expand on these rules and will include force-specific vehicle rules.

Note that the term *infantry* is used to indicate non-vehicle models.

VEHICLE TYPES AND SIZES

Vehicles come in four distinct types (wheeled, tracked, walker and flyer) and three sizes (light, medium and heavy).

Wheeled vehicles include cars, trucks, motorbikes and anything else using wheels to get around; these have a lower Point Value, but can only be used in open terrain. *Tracked* vehicles include tanks, tractors and other vehicles that use rotating tracks to overcome broken terrain. *Walkers* tend to be humanoid or spider-shaped, and use mechanical legs to maneuver through rough terrain.

Flyers are hovercraft, autogyros, helicopters and other small vertical takeoff and landing craft; jets and other high-speed craft are beyond the scope of this rulebook. Flying vehicles have a higher Point Value as they are not hindered by terrain. Note that flyers are always considered to be hovering just above the terrain, and as such altitude is not a consideration; treat them as other land-based models.

A vehicle's size determines how it moves and turns. The bulk of the vehicles used in *VOR* are of the *medium* size category. *Light* vehicles are designed to move faster on the battlefield, while *heavy* vehicles are heavily armored or heavily armed, and the corresponding weight limits their maneuverability in combat.

Vehicle units can be either squads or individual (see p. 90).

TRANSPORT VEHICLES

Some vehicles may also be designated as *transport* vehicles. Troop transports represent a wide variety of vehicles designed to safely move troops around the battlefield. Most have above-average armor and can carry up to 10 small or medium models; large models may not be transported unless stated otherwise. A transport's carrying capacity is listed in parenthesis after the vehicle type.

For a flat cost of 1 MP, a model may enter or exit a transport vehicle. If a vehicle has an obvious hatch, door, or other access point, that is where models must enter and exit the vehicle. A model may not enter and exit a vehicle during the same game turn. A model may not enter an enemy vehicle and large models may not enter vehicles at all.

A model must be in base-to-base contact with the transport in order to enter it. When a model enters a transport, remove it from the playing area, and set it aside with any other models already inside the vehicle. Models inside a transport can't do anything, though they can be activated in order to disembark.

A model must leave a vehicle during its own activation, not that of the vehicle. You are not allowed to "interrupt" a transport vehicle's movement to deploy a unit it is carrying. When a model leaves a vehicle, simply place the base of the model flush against the vehicle and begin its movement from that point.

When a squad enters or exits a vehicle, all the models in the squad must do so at the same time.

VEHICLE STATISTICS

Vehicles' statistics define their characteristics and allow them to interact with other models during a game.

In *VOR*, some vehicles are manned by crews, some are autonomous robots and others are remote-controlled drones. Regardless, each vehicle is treated as an individual entity; its stats encompass factors such as crews, artificial intelligence and so on. Note that vehicles do not have Brains and Guts stats (see *Brains and Guts*, p. 91).

Move Points (MP): Move Points determine the distance a vehicle may move during a turn.

Turn Cost (TC): All vehicles must pay a MP Cost to make a turn during their activation (see *Turning*, p. 90).

Close Combat (CC): Walker-type vehicles may possess close combat capabilities.

Ranged Combat (RC): Most vehicles have one or more weapon systems used to deliver death from a distance. The Ranged Combat stat determines a vehicle's effectiveness with these weapons.

Power (POW): Power represents the momentum of the vehicle in motion. A vehicle's Power also determines the might of its engine for purposes of moving out of difficult terrain such as deep mud and loose debris.

Body (BOD): A vehicle's Body indicates how well the chassis or frame will stand up against attacks.

Lifeforce (LIF): The Lifeforce of a vehicle represents the number of damaging hits it can take before being destroyed.

Armor Rating (AR): A vehicle's armor helps protect it from attacks. The higher the Armor Rating, the more effective the armor.

Shielding (SHD): Shielding represents the ability of thick vehicle armor to resist the armor-piercing effects of certain weapons (see *Shielding*, p. 91). Shielding is listed in parenthesis after the vehicle's Armor Rating.

Point Value (PV): The Point Value of a vehicle repre-

sents the vehicle's effectiveness in the game. The higher the Point value, the more effective the vehicle.

VEHICLE MOVEMENT COST TABLE

	Terrain Type			
Vehicle Type	**Open**	**Broken**	**Hazardous**	**Impassable**
Wheeled	1 MP	—	—	—
Tracked	1 MP	2 MP	—	—
Walker	1 MP	1 MP	2 MP	—
Flyer	1 MP	1 MP	1 MP	1 MP

VEHICLE MOVEMENT

In open terrain, a vehicle spends 1 MP for each inch it moves, just like other models. In other terrain, the MP cost for each inch of movement varies depending on the type of terrain and vehicle, as shown in the Vehicle Movement Cost Table above.

Coherency: Vehicle squads have a 6-inch coherency (see *Squad Coherency*, p. 77).

TURNING

In order to make a turn during its activation, a vehicle must pay a MP Cost based on its size: 1 for light vehicles, 2 for medium and 3 for heavy.

In addition, the size of a vehicle restricts the number of turns it may make in a game turn. Light vehicles may make any number of turns, but medium vehicles are restricted to two turns during their activation. Heavy vehicles are limited to making no more than a single turn during their activation.

When you pay the MP to turn a vehicle, you are allowed to turn it up to 90 degrees. Vehicles always turn as if on a center axis; in other words, spin the model in place as if there were an imaginary nail driven through the center of it. Models are not allowed to make two turns in a row; at least 1 inch of movement must be made before each turn. Vehicles are also not allowed to begin movement with a turn, they must first move at least 1 inch.

Flying vehicles may turn up to 180 degrees each time they turn.

VEHICLE COLLISIONS

When a vehicle moves into base-to-base contact with another model, the two models are considered to have collided. No die roll is required to hit; the collision occurs automatically, though infantry models may attempt to dodge out of the way.

Dodging Vehicles

Infantry models may attempt to dodge a vehicle collision when the vehicle moves into base contact but before the effects of the collision are resolved. Success is determined by rolling D10 with a result equal to or less than the dodging model's Close Combat. On a successful dodge, the model's owner places the model to one side of the path of the oncoming vehicle. A model cannot move more than 3 inches in this way; if the distance required to clear the path of a vehicle is more than 3 inches, the model cannot dodge the vehicle.

Collision Damage

Use the Body or Power (whichever is higher) of the vehicle as the Power of a hit against a model or another vehicle struck by a vehicle. The armor modifier (AM) for the collision is half the vehicle's Power (rounded down). A vehicle colliding with a large model or another vehicle takes a hit with a Power equal to the Body of the target. Only a vehicle may make an Armor Test against damage from a collision with another vehicle. If a vehicle collides with a large inanimate terrain feature, such as a bunker, boulder, large tree and so on, the vehicle takes 1 point of damage.

Infantry: If a medium or heavy vehicle collides with an infantry model, the infantry model may not make an Armor Test to avoid damage. Small or medium models injured as a result of the collision are immediately killed (regardless of remaining Lifeforce); larger models take 2 points of damage. Vehicles do not take damage from a collision with small or medium infantry.

If a light vehicle collides with an infantry model, the infantry model makes Armor and Damage Tests as normal. If it is injured as a result, it takes one point of damage.

COMBAT

Because they are designed to move and fire simultaneously, vehicles do not spend MP to fire each weapon. Instead, the number of MP a vehicle uses for movement determines how many of its weapons it can fire in that turn. If a vehicle uses half or less of its MP for movement in a turn, it may fire all its weapons once in that turn. If the vehicle uses more than half its MP for movement, it may fire a single weapon once in that turn. Linked weapons count as a single weapon for this purpose.

RANGED ATTACK LOS

When determining line of sight (see p. 81) for vehicle-based ranged attacks, sight from the center of the vehicle. For large heavy vehicles, sight from the specific point on the model where the weapon being used is mounted.

DAMAGE

Use the standard rules to determine successful attacks and damage against vehicles.

If a vehicle takes damage, it may also suffer additional

effects. When a vehicle suffers damage, subtract the damage from the vehicle's Lifeforce as usual. Roll D10 and add the vehicle's current amount of damage to the result, then consult the Vehicle Damage Table. For example, if a tank with a LIF of 5 had already taken 3 hits that inflicted 1 point of damage each, the player would add 3 to the die roll result.

If a vehicle suffers more than one of the same Internal Damage results, the effects are cumulative where applicable, unless the table states otherwise.

VEHICLE DAMAGE TABLE

Die Roll Result	Effect
1–6	No additional damage effects.
7–10	**Internal damage.** Roll D10 and consult the Internal Damage Table. (See also *Damaging Models in Transit,* below.)
11+	**Detonation!** The vehicle explodes in a huge fireball, sending scrap and debris in all directions. All models within 3 inches take a hit of Power 6, AM –3, and make a Knockdown Test. Each model being transported by this vehicle must make a successful Armor Test or be destroyed. Use the *Scatter* rules, p. 84, to determine the position of any surviving models, using the center of the vehicle's position as the point of impact. Models thrown clear by the explosion are placed prone.

INTERNAL DAMAGE TABLE

Die Roll Result	Effect
1	**Unlucky shot!** The attack did not inflict any additional damage when it pierced the vehicle's armor. No effect.
2–3	**Immobilized!** The vehicle is frozen in its current position and may not move for the rest of the game. The vehicle may attack as normal. If vehicle is a transport, then friendly models may enter and exit it as normal.
4–5	**Damaged locomotion!** The vehicle's source of locomotion (tracks, wheels, thrusters and so on) is damaged. The vehicle's MP is reduced by half (round down) for the rest of the game. If the player rolls this result a second time, the vehicle becomes immobilized as described above.
6–7	**Destroyed weaponry!** This result destroys one of the vehicle's weapons. Roll D10: on a result of 5 or less, the attacker chooses the weapon destroyed; on a 6 or more, the owner of the vehicle chooses which weapon is destroyed. The destroyed weapon cannot be used for the remainder of the game. If the vehicle has no weapons to destroy, then this result has no effect.
8–9	**Haywire electronics!** The internal wiring of the vehicle shorts out, wreaking havoc on its targeting and combat systems. Modify all attacks made by the vehicle by –2 until the end of the game.
10	**Chain reaction!** A series of small explosions rips through the vehicle. The vehicle takes 1 additional point of damage, and you must immediately roll on the Vehicle Damage Table again.

Shielding

The basic design of a vehicle allows it to carry substantially more armor than infantry. To reflect this greater durability, vehicle armor also provides shielding. Shielding reduces the armor modifier of an attack made against it by an amount equal to its Shielding statistic. For example, a vehicle with Shielding of 2 would reduce an armor modifier of –3 to –1, and ignore an armor modifier of –2 or less.

Damaging Models in Transit

When a vehicle transporting models takes internal damage (per the *Vehicle Damage Table,* above), you must determine whether any transported models are affected by the attack in addition to the usual effects of the attack. Before rolling on the Internal Damage Table, roll D10; on a result of 3 or less, the cargo area of the vehicle has been hit and each model in the transport must make an Armor Save. If the Armor Save fails, the model takes 1 point of damage. If the transport has an open cargo area (for example, a pickup truck), the attack hits the cargo area on a result of 6 or less.

BRAINS AND GUTS

The pilots, crew and artificial-intelligence chips of vehicles feel more confident in their chances for survival in battle than their infantry brethren, and so automatically succeed in any Brains and Guts Tests they must make during a game, including Morale Tests.

GENERIC VEHICLES

The following examples represent the most common types of vehicle, and can be used as a basis for creating other vehicle designs. See *Weapon/Ability Statistics,* p. 120, for an explanation of the weapon stats.

ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIER (APC)

MP: 25 **TD:** 5″ **CC:** 0 **RC:** 5 **POW:** 6 **BOD:** 6
LIF: 4 **AR:** 5 (3)
Point Value: 100
Weapons: None
Type: Medium Tracked Transport (10)

TANK

MP: 2 **TD:** Full **CC:** 0 **RC:** 6 **POW:** 6 **BOD:** 6
LIF: 5 **AR:** 6 (3)
Point Value: 150
Type: Heavy Tracked
Weapons: Main cannon (360 degree firing arc); hull-mounted LMG (90 degree forward firing arc)

ATTACK HELICOPTER

MP: 30 **TD:** 3″ **CC:** 0 **RC:** 6 **POW:** 5 **BOD:** 5
LIF: 3 **AR:** 5 (2)
Point Value: 200
Type: Medium Flyer
Weapons: Chin-mounted HMG (180 degree forward firing arc, see p. 81); for a cost of 50 PV, twin linked quad-missile launchers (180 degree forward firing arc)

VEHICLE WEAPONS ARSENAL

These are but a few examples of vehicle-mounted weaponry.

Main Cannon

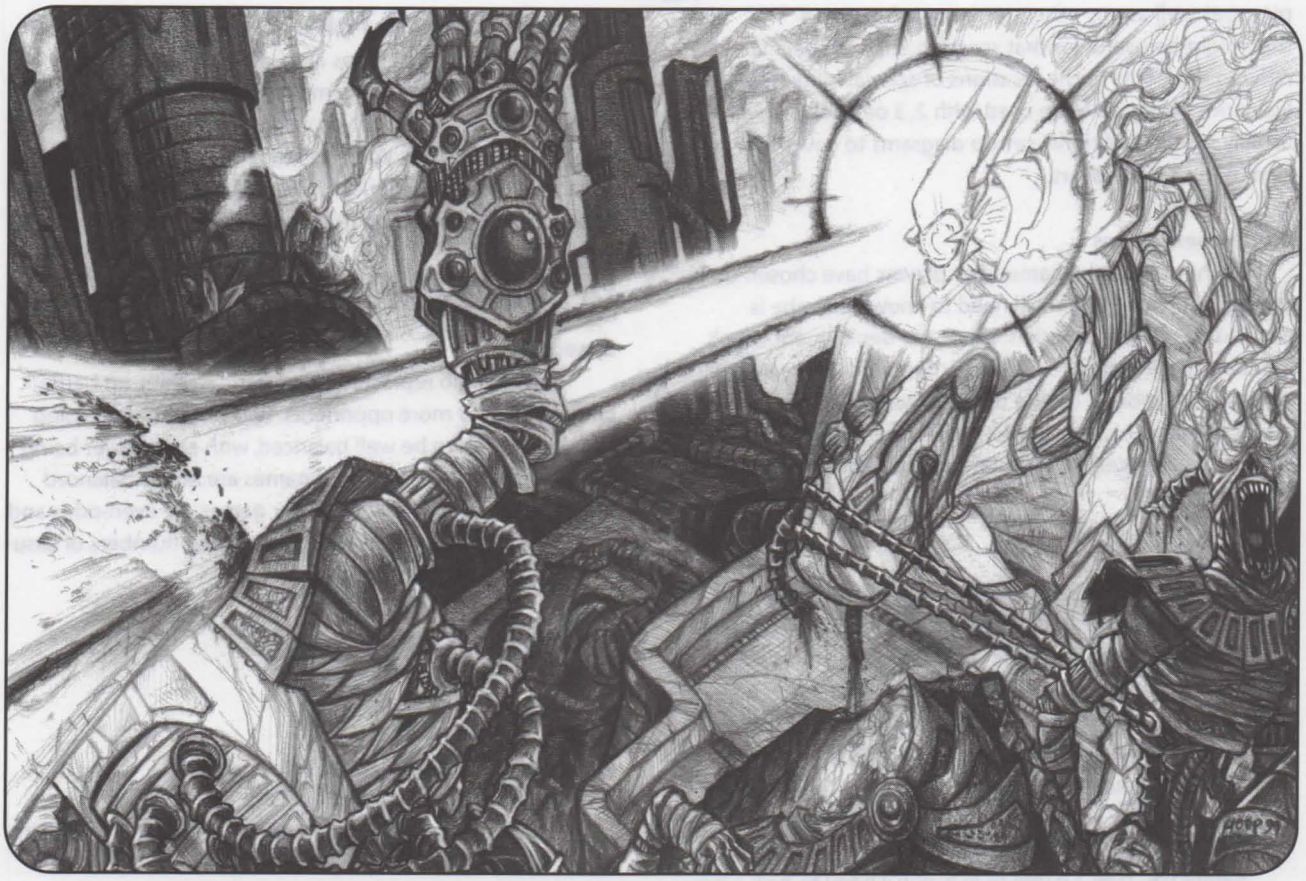
This heavy assault weapon fires a superplast explosive warhead effective against most targets. [**Range: S** 20/—, **M** 40/+1, **L** 60/—, **Power:** 7, **AM:** –5, **Damage:** 2]

Light Machine Gun (LMG)

This light vehicle weapon is useful for mopping up infantry. **Range: S** 10/+1, **M** 20/—, **L** 30/–1, **Power:** 5, **AM :** –2, **Mode:** full-auto]

Quad Missile Launcher

More effective than normal missiles, quad missile launchers launch four warheads with each shot (treated as one attack only). [**Range: S** 25/—, **M** 50/+1, **L** 75/—, **Power:** 8, **AM:** –4, **Damage:** 2, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 2″]



SCENARIO RULES

In the *VOR* universe, battles aren't usually fought by forces that just happen to run across each other somewhere and decide to fight. Typically, battles are fought for specific reasons, such as strategically important locations, defense of a critical position, attempts to minimize the supplies of an enemy and so on. Scenarios give a flavor and a theme to games of *VOR* by creating an interesting situation or event for your battles. There are endless numbers of scenarios that can be created, limited only by your imagination. As an introduction to how scenarios work, we have described the data that you'll find in each scenario and instructions on how to use it in your games. Following this information are a number of basic scenario templates, as well as a detailed Battle Terrain Table for generating random features to customize a battlefield.

SCENARIO FORMATS

Although the information contained in each scenario will be different, it will always be presented in the same format for clarity. Each scenario has seven different parts, which are described below.

Synopsis: The synopsis is a brief description of the plot of a scenario.

# of Players: The suggested number of players for a scenario can be found here.

Suggested PV: This is the ideal total Point Value (PV) each player in a scenario should be given to purchase their force with. Players should consult the *Force Lists* (p. 120) to choose the units they wish to play, keeping in mind force structure limitations.

Set-up: This entry gives details on setting up the playing field, including any unique requirements the scenario may have for placing terrain or deploying models. This section also contains a diagram illustrating the deployment zones for the scenario.

Special Rules: If the scenario uses any special rules they will be listed here.

Objectives: Any additional objects or situations that will gain players additional Glory Points (GP) for the scenario will be listed in this section.

Time: This section will tell you how many turns the scenario lasts. Most scenarios have a variable number of turns that they can last; when this is the case, roll D10 and consult the table in the scenario to determine the game length.

SET-UP DIAGRAMS

Each scenario will be accompanied by at least one set-up diagram that shows you the deployment zones for each

player, as well as any other pertinent information that might be useful for that scenario, such as specific terrain requirements or the locations of special markers. Scenarios designed to be used with 2, 3 or 4 players will usually supply additional set-up diagrams to cover the inclusion of the extra players.

Deployment Zones

At the start of the game, after players have chosen their table edges, each player will need to know where he is allowed to set up his models. This is the deployment zone's function, to illustrate the region of the board where a player can place his models during the deployment phase. Each player will have his own deployment zone, and the *Set-up* section of each scenario will state which deployment zone is for which player.

Other Features

Some scenario set-up diagrams will also contain additional information such as important terrain features or special objectives. When these are included on the diagrams, you'll be required to represent them in some manner on your game board. You don't have to use the exact objects described; anything will do as long as all players involved understand the purpose of the terrain piece in the scenario.

CHOOSING A SCENARIO

Before you play a game of *VOR* you'll need to pick a scenario to play; the templates below are a good place to start. If you're not sure which scenario to choose for your game, we recommend using the basic *Confrontation* scenario; it's the fairest and most balanced scenario of the bunch. If you're looking for a deviation from the norm, then read through the other scenarios and find one that sounds good for what you and your opponent(s) want to play. If the scenario you choose has specific roles defined, such as an attacker and a defender, then you'll need to determine which player will be playing which role for the game.

For examples of more detailed scenarios using the models and terrain included in the *VOR* boxed set, see the *Scenarios Book* included in the box.

MAKING YOUR OWN SCENARIOS

At some point you're probably going to want to make up some scenarios of your own. This can be fun to do, and it's not too difficult. Initially, you should try altering existing scenarios to make new ones. It's important to keep any scenarios you create as balanced as possible for all the players; this can actually be the most challenging part of creating new scenarios. Once you're comfortable modifying existing scenarios, you should move on to making up completely new ones. If your gaming group is playing a *VOR* campaign (see p. 105), you may want to playtest new scenarios a few times before using them in campaign games.

SCENARIO TEMPLATES

The following scenarios are a collection of the most basic game set-ups. These templates are recommended for players new to *VOR*. Once you've played a few basic games using these scenarios, you'll be ready to move on to more advanced custom scenarios. Unless stated otherwise, use the deployment diagrams on p. 75 for the scenario set-up.

SCENARIO 1: CONFRONTATION

Synopsis

This scenario represents your basic straight-up battle between two or more opponents. Two-player games using this set-up tend to be well balanced, with each player being on equal ground. Three-player games are not as balanced but usually fun to play. Four-player games are even-odds and intense events that can result in staggering numbers of casualties during any given turn.

# of Players

2, 3 or 4 players

Suggested PV:

2-player game: 500–1000 PV per player
3-player game: 500–750 PV per player
4-player game: 250–500 PV per player

Set-up

Use the standard rules for setting up terrain and for deploying your forces (see p. 75). Players may use any options allowed by their force lists.

Special Rules

Roll once on the Battle Terrain Table (p. 97) to generate an effect for the game.

Objectives

Players have no additional objectives beyond eliminating their enemies. Use the standard rules for awarding Glory Points and determining a winner.

Time

Roll D10 to determine the length of the game:

1–3	6 turns
4–7	7 turns
8–10	8 turns

SCENARIO 2: AMBUSH

Synopsis

This scenario simulates a larger, superior force being ambushed by a smaller, inferior force. This sort of tactic is common in situations where a weaker force is desperate or

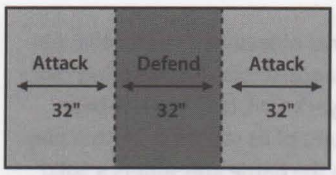
grossly outnumbered, and they don't have the option to retreat. Pulling off an ambush can be a very dangerous task for the attacking force. The first turn of the battle is the only time the ambushers have a real advantage; they have to cause as much damage as possible right away, or they will be hard-pressed to succeed.

# of Players

2 players

Suggested PV

Attacking (Ambushing) force: 500 PV
Defending force: 750 PV



Set-up

Use the diagram at left to determine initial deployment zones. The defender sets up first; once all models are placed, the attacking (ambushing) player may then place his models. The ambushing player can deploy models in one or both of the designated zones. Use the standard rules for placing terrain.

Special Rules

Roll once on the Battle Terrain Table (p. 97) to generate an effect for the game.

The Ambushing player automatically gets Initiative for the first turn. In addition, each defending unit that is activated has to make a Brains Test to be able to do anything on the first turn. Failing this test means the unit is stunned by the ambush and may not act this turn. This means the Ambushing player may get to use several units in a row if the defending player fails any of his units' Brains Tests.

Objectives

Players have no additional objectives beyond eliminating the enemy. Use the standard rules for awarding Glory Points and determining a winner.

Time

Roll D10 to determine the length of the game:

1–2	4 turns
3–8	5 turns
9–10	6 turns

SCENARIO 3: TAKE AND HOLD

Synopsis

Opposing forces clash for control of a dominant terrain feature present on the battlefield. The force that controls it at the end wins.

# of Players

2, 3 or 4 players

Suggested PV

2-player game: 500–1000 PV per player
3-player game: 500–750 PV per player
4-player game: 250–500 PV per player

Set-up

In addition to using the standard rules to set up terrain for this scenario, place a medium or large terrain piece in the center of the playing area as an objective piece. This can be any piece as long as it is of at least moderate size (i.e., 3"–6" square). Some possible ideas for this would be a bunker, power generator, landing pad or supply cache. Use the standard rules for deploying your forces (see p. 75). Players may use any options allowed by their force lists.

Special Rules

Roll once on the Battle Terrain Table (p. 97) to generate an effect for the game.

Objectives

The player that controls the main objective terrain feature at the end of the game wins. For a player to control the feature, he must have at least one model within 6 inches of the objective piece at the end of the last turn. If two or more players have models within 6 inches of the objective at the end of the last turn, the game continues until the end of any turn where only one player has a model within 6 inches of the objective. Even if a player is not involved in such a "tie," he continues to play and may even win the scenario. If this scenario is part of a campaign (see p. 105), a victory here counts as a Solid Victory, and a defeat counts as a Solid Defeat.

Time

Roll D10 to determine the length of the game:

1–3	5 turns
4–8	6 turns
9–10	7 turns

SCENARIO 4: RESOURCE RAID

Synopsis

Occasionally a battle will be held over resources or supplies. These battles get interesting because the opposing forces must fight off their enemies while simultaneously securing whatever resources or supplies may be present on the battlefield. If players aren't careful in this scenario, they can lose to greed alone.

# of Players

2, 3 or 4 players

Suggested PV

2-player game: 500–1000 PV per player
3-player game: 500–750 PV per player
4-player game: 250–500 PV per player

Set-up

Use the standard rules for setting up terrain and for deploying your forces (see p. 75). In addition, each player gets to place 3 resource-pile markers on the board. These markers should be 1–2 inch squares. Players should alternate placing their markers. No marker can be within 6 inches of another or within 12 inches from a table edge. Players may use any options allowed by their force lists.

Special Rules

Roll once on the Battle Terrain Table (p. 97) to generate an effect for the game.

Models may pick up the resource marker by moving on it, expending 2 MP, and making a Power Test. A model may try multiple times to pick up a resource marker, expending 2 MP for each attempt. A model carrying a resource marker has its MP reduced by 2. In addition, a carrying model cannot make any ranged or melee attacks unless it drops the resource marker. If a model that is carrying a resource marker is attacked (melee or ranged), it must make a Power Test to hang on to the goods. A model that dies while holding a resource marker drops the marker where it died.

Objectives

Each resource-pile marker is worth +50 Glory Points to the player whose model is holding it at the end of the game. Otherwise, use the standard rules for awarding Glory Points and determining a winner.

Time

Roll D10 to determine the length of the game:

1–3	6 turns
4–7	7 turns
8–10	8 turns

SCENARIO 5: SKIRMISH

Synopsis

It's not unusual for opposing forces to meet unexpectedly within the Maelstrom. As a matter of fact, this is a common occurrence when forces are sent out to scout unknown regions. These conflicts tend to be shorter than most since commanders don't want to unnecessarily deplete their resources in pointless, unplanned battles.

# of Players

2, 3 or 4 players

Suggested PV

2-player game: 500–1000 PV per player
3-player game: 500–750 PV per player
4-player game: 250–500 PV per player

Set-up

Use the standard rules for setting up terrain and for deploying your forces (see p. 75). Players may use any options allowed by their force lists.

Special Rules

Roll once on the Battle Terrain Table (p. 97) to generate an effect for the game.

Objectives

Players have no additional objectives beyond eliminating their enemies. Use the standard rules for awarding Glory Points. If, at the start of a player's turn, his force has been reduced to less than 50 percent of its starting size, that player immediately retreats from the battle and suffers a Solid Defeat, regardless of Glory Points (see *Campaign Rules*, p. 105). If this leaves only one player on the map, then that player scores a Solid Victory, regardless of Glory Points.

Time

Roll D10 to determine the length of the game:

1–3	6 turns
4–7	7 turns
8–10	8 turns

SCENARIO 6: BLOODBATH

Synopsis

This scenario simulates battles in which neither side is willing to give up or give in. This is most often the case when a force is cornered or is defending a vital locale or structure. These battles are brutal and deadly in the extreme, more often than not resulting in the absolute destruction of one of the forces involved.

Be warned that these games can end up being quite a bit longer than normal games of *VOR*.

# of Players

2, 3 or 4 players

Suggested PV

2-player games: 500–1000 PV per player
3-player games: 500–750 PV per player
4-player games: 250–500 PV per player

Set-up

Use the standard rules for setting up terrain and for deploying your forces (see p. 75). Players may use any options allowed by their force lists.

Special Rules

Roll once on the Battle Terrain Table below to generate an effect for the game.

No models may voluntarily leave the table. Panicked models will not run off the table edge. If a "broken" result is rolled for a panicked model, treat it as "pushed back" instead.

Objectives

Players have no additional objectives beyond eliminating their enemies.

This is a battle to the death. The battle ends when there is only one player with models remaining on the board. If this scenario is being played as part of a campaign (see p. 105), the winner of the bloodbath scores a Solid Victory, and each loser suffers a Solid Defeat.

Time

There is no time limit for this scenario. Play until you drop.

BATTLE TERRAIN TABLE

The Maelstrom is a vast and diverse region filled with a dizzying variety of worlds and creatures. The Battle Terrain Table allows you to create the same limitless number of terrain types in your own games of *VOR*.

USING THE BATTLE TERRAIN TABLE

Use the Battle Terrain Table before setting up the playing area. Roll D100, and use the die roll result to determine the terrain type for the battle.

If an entry requires a roll at the start of the turn, that roll is made before anything else is determined in that turn. Where applicable, each entry includes notes for campaign effects. Unless otherwise stated, all results from this table remain in effect for the entire game.

If you are playing a campaign in a specific area, for example, the tundra of northern Russia, and roll a terrain effect that doesn't quite fit that terrain, simply tweak the effect to be more appropriate to your setting.

DETERMINING A RANDOM MODEL

Many terrain types affect a random model. The following steps suggest one way to determine a random model. First, determine which player's model will be affected; then determine which unit will be affected; then which specific model.

1. Determine a Player

Assign each player in the game a number or range of numbers from 1 to 10, dividing the numbers between the players as evenly as possible. For example, if there are three players, assign 1–3 to the first player, 4–6 to the second player, and 7–9 to the third player, re-rolling a result of 10. Roll D10; the random model will be chosen from the models of the player whose number matches the result.

2. Determine a Unit

To determine the unit affected, assign a number to each unit (remember that both squads and individuals count as a unit). Roll D10 if the player has 10 or fewer units in play, re-rolling any unassigned numbers. If the player has more than 10 units, roll D100.

3. Determine a Model

If the unit selected is an individual model, that model suffers the terrain effect. If the unit selected is a squad, again assign a number to each member of the squad as in Step 2, then roll the appropriate dice to determine the model affected.

DETERMINING A RANDOM SPOT ON THE BOARD

Some events affect a random location on the playing area. To determine a random location, roll D100, measure a number of inches equal to the result from one corner of the long side of the playing area and mark that location with a die or some other object. Roll D100 again, and measure that many inches from the same corner of the playing area, but along the short edge, marking that location. Draw an imaginary line straight out from the edge of the playing area from each of these points; the spot where they intersect is the location affected.

If your playing area is larger than 100 inches on either side, simply roll additional D100s as necessary. Re-roll any values higher than the length or width of the playing area.

01–02 WEIRD SKY

The sky overhead is an amorphous, swirling mix of colors. This has no effect on game play.

03–04 PHASING TERRAIN

The terrain in the region has a tendency to phase in and out of this dimension. Roll D10 for each piece of terrain at the beginning of each turn. To save time, roll for smaller terrain features (small boulders, scrub bushes) as a group.

1–6 No change. The terrain stays in its current state. If it was phased out last turn, it will stay phased out. If it was solid, it will remain solid.

7–8 Solid. The piece of terrain is solid this turn. If it was phased out last turn, then it becomes solid this turn.

9–10 Phased out. The terrain piece phases out of existence. If the piece of terrain was solid last turn, it becomes phased out. If it was already phased out, then it stays that way.

Phased out terrain does not modify LOS or ranged attacks. Models may move through phased-out terrain, but if a model ends its movement in a piece of terrain that then becomes solid, that model is removed from play as a casualty.

05–07 CRYSTAL FIELDS

This area of land has recently been overrun with an unfamiliar crystalline growth. Clusters of crystals dot the immediate landscape. The crystal fields pose the constant threat of new crystal pylons erupting from the ground. Roll D10 at the beginning of each turn. Use a marker or appropriate terrain (if available) to represent the new crystalline growths. The crystal pylons should be no more than 2 x 2 inches; they will block LOS.

If a crystal pylon erupts underneath a model, the model makes a Dodge Test to try to avoid it. If the model fails to dodge, it takes a [**Power:** 4, **AM:** 0] hit and is placed prone adjacent to the pylon.

1–7 No effect.

8–9 Minor eruption. D5 crystal pylons erupt from the ground in random locations.

10 Massive eruption. D10 + 2 crystal pylons erupt from the ground.

08–09 ANCIENT BATTLEGROUND

This battlefield is the site of thousands of previous battles, and the emotional anguish and horror of those past conflicts has saturated the region, burning the sounds of the screams and cries of agony into the terrain forever. Any Morale Tests made during this battle are at –1 GUT. Treat rolls of 1, 2 and 3 on the Panic Table, p. 88, as "Paralyzed!"

10 ACID RAIN

Corrosive rain falls in sheets onto the battlefield, pitting and corroding everything it touches. At the start of the game (prior to deployment), roll D10 for each vehicle and heavy/special weapon present in each player's force. On a roll of 5 or less, the vehicle/weapon is unavailable for this game. Models that are deprived of their heavy/special weapons in this way should use their standard weapon(s). Models that have no standard weapons may not be used for this battle.

11–12 UNNATURAL DARKNESS

An eerie darkness falls upon the landscape, and so no model can see further than 24 inches. No weapons or attacks may be made beyond this range. The dense shroud of darkness is so unnerving that any Morale Test required by an affected model is at –1 GUT. The unnatural darkness does not affect power armor, vehicles or zykhee.

13 AWESOME PRESENCE

As the battle is about to begin, a huge translucent face materializes above the battlefield, staring down accusingly at the combatants gathered below. The battle continues, but every unit on the field is unnerved by the hateful gaze of the being above them. Any unit that fails a Morale Test at any time during the battle is removed as a casualty.

14–15 ATMOSPHERIC PHENOMENA

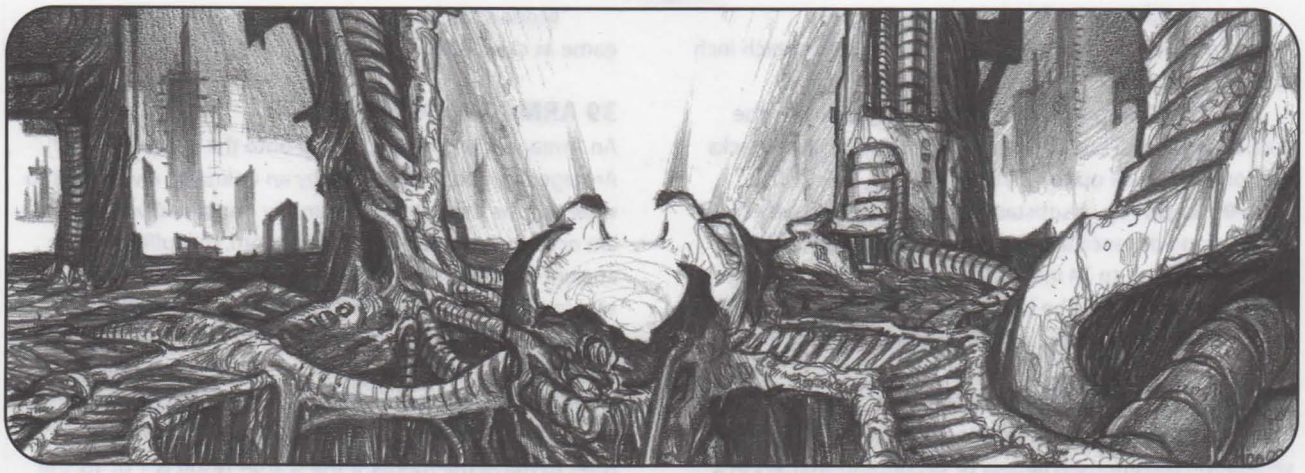
The sky is filled with multi-colored gases that writhe and twist about as if possessing an alien intelligence. Beyond providing an amazing aerial display, this event has no effect on game play.

16–18 RAINSTORM

The battlefield is drenched by a large rainstorm. Roll D10 at the beginning of each turn to determine the intensity of the rainstorm.

1–3 Steady rain. The storm is mild and continues to release a fair amount of rain onto the area. This has no effect on game play.

4–6 Heavy rain. The storm intensifies, releasing a torrential downpour onto the battlefield. Each model that moves must make a Knockdown Test at the end of its activation.



7–9 Lightning storm! This has the same effect as heavy rain, except that a randomly determined model is blasted by a lightning bolt. Each player rolls D10; the player with the highest result randomly determines a model in his force to be struck by lightning. The victim takes a [**Power:** 6, **AM:** no test] hit and is automatically knocked prone.

10 Rain, rain, go away. The storm disperses and has no further effect on the game.

19 MAW JETTISON

The whole battlefield is silenced by the deafening sound of a random jettison of material from the Maw. The brightly glowing jet of deadly plasma rockets out of the Maw at an incredible speed, annihilating one world in its path and melting a hole through the side of another. The intense spectacle ends with the fading plasma debris piercing the Veil and disapearing from view. After a moment the forces shake off the fantastic sight and continue fighting. This result has no effect on game play.

20–21 SCORCHING AIR

The atmosphere of this region is unusually hot and arid, making life difficult for most of the lifeforms present. Make a Body Test for any model that uses all of its available MP when it is activated, after the model has resolved its actions for that turn. If the test fails, the model is overcome with heat exhaustion and is removed from play as a casualty. Vehicles, pharon and Firegut growlers are not affected by the scorching heat.

22–24 SNOWSTORM

The land is engulfed by a large snowstorm. Roll D10 at the beginning of each turn to determine the effect this storm has on the battle.

1–3 Light powder. The snowfall is light and has no effect on game play.

4–6 Heavy snow. The snowfall is moderate, hampering movement. Infantry may move no more than 7 inches during their activation because of the intense winds and blowing snow. Vehicles are unaffected by the snow. Modify all ranged attacks made this turn by –1 RC.

7–9 Blizzard! Heavy snowfall prevents infantry from moving more than 5 inches during their activation; vehicles may not move more than 10 inches. Modify all ranged attacks made this turn by –1 RC.

10 Clear weather. The snowstorm disperses and has no further effect on the game.

25 TEMPORARY DARKNESS

A massive object has eclipsed the planetoid you are fighting on, casting the battlefield into pitch darkness. Modify all ranged attacks made at 20 inches or more by –1 RC. Roll D10 at the start of each subsequent turn after the darkness descends; on a 5 or less the object has moved on, and play returns to normal.

26–27 STRANGE FLUFF

A bizarre downfall of a soft, brightly colored substance drifts down onto the battlefield. This has no effect on game play.

28–29 SHIFTING MUDFLATS

The ground in this region is composed of large areas of shifting mud. Treat all the open areas of the playing area as broken terrain (see p. 78).

30–31 CRYSTALLINE GROWTH

A fine, web-like growth of crystals has overgrown this entire region. The growth gets as high as knee deep in areas, and its sharp edges pose a threat to those who move quickly while on or in this terrain. Any model that jumps or goes prone during this game takes a [**Power:** 3, **AM:** 0] hit.

32–34 DENSE FOG

The battlefield is covered in a thick fog that hampers long-range attacks. Roll D10 at the beginning of each turn to determine the effect of the fog for that turn.

1 Solid fog! The fog is so dense that NO ranged attacks may be made this turn. In addition, each inch of movement costs +1 MP.

2–5 Thick fog. An extremely thick fog blankets the area, obscuring all but the nearest features. Ranged attacks may only be made up to 12 inches.

6–9 Light fog. A substantial fog covers the battlefield, making long distance attacks difficult. Ranged attacks may only be made up to 24 inches.

10 Fog Clears. The fog lifts from the battlefield and has no effect for the remainder of the game.

35–36 SHATTERSTAR BUSHES

Clusters of shatterstar bushes dot the battlefield. This alien vegetation is composed largely of silicon, and shatters in a violent explosion in response to vibrations caused by the movements of other beings. Before the game, players should take turns placing a total of 6 markers on the playing area indicating the location of shatterstar bushes. These markers must be at least 10 inches apart and 10 inches from the edge of the playing area. At the end of each turn, roll D10 for each bush. For every model within 6 inches of a bush, modify the die roll result as follows: +1 for each medium-sized model, +2 for each large model, +3 for each ground vehicle. A bush will explode on a result of 10 or more. Models caught within 6 inches of an exploding bush take a [**Power:** 4, **AM:** –1] hit. A shatterstar bush may explode multiple times and is not removed from play after it explodes.

37 GLASSY TERRAIN

The entire landscape is covered in a glasslike substance, which makes movement very tricky. Make a Knockdown Test for each non-vehicle model at the end of its activation if it moved more than 3 inches. For vehicles, roll D10. On a result of 3 or less, spin the vehicle to face a random direction at the end of their activation. Flying models are not affected by the glassy terrain.

38 CRUMBLY GROUND

The ground in this area is pitted and unstable. Roll D10, and place a number of markers equal to the result on the board to designate points on the battlefield that seem dangerous to cross. When any model moves within 3 inches of a marker, roll D10 and apply the appropriate result.

1–5 Relatively stable. Though brittle, the ground is stable enough to travel across. This result has no game effect.

6–8 Sinkhole. The area in a radius of 3 inches surrounding the marker is comprised of loose, crumbly dirt that collapses into a large, shallow depression. Treat this area as broken terrain (see p. 78).

9–10 Gaping pit. The ground collapses to reveal a deep hole with a 3-inch radius centered on the marker. If an infantry model triggered the collapse, the model makes a Dodge Test to avoid falling in. Vehicles automatically fall in. Models that fall into the hole are removed from the game as casualties.

39 ARMAGEDDON SENTRY

An Armageddon bot has drifted onto the battlefield. Armageddon bots were used by an unknown civilization to wipe out the inhabitants of densely populated worlds. They are occasionally seen in the Maelstrom, still fulfilling their ancient programming. Most of these bots are in a state of severe disrepair, because it has been decades since their last maintenance. Either scratch-build your own Armageddon bot or use a 2-inch round base to represent it in the game.

The Armageddon bots start the game in the center of the board. At the beginning of each turn, use the scatter rules to move the model. If the scatter result is 1 or 10, the Armageddon bot moves a second time after making any available attacks. The bot continues to move as long as it rolls a 1 or 10. If an Armageddon bot moves off the edge of the playing field, it is removed from play. The Armageddon bots are considered hover vehicles, and so they have no terrain restrictions. Any model within 12 inches of the bot when it stops moving is a valid target. Roll D10. On a result of 8 or less, the model suffers a [**Power:** 6, **AM:** (no test)] hit. If they survive, they must make a Knockdown Test. The Armaggedon bots cannot be damaged; players can only try to avoid them and hope they eventually move off the battlefield.

40 WRITHING WEEDS

The ground vegetation moves and acts of its own accord. The alien weeds attempt to immobilize any models that fall down so that they can consume them over time. For any models that go prone during the game, it costs 5 MP to stand up.

41-43 ATMOSPHERIC PHENOMENA

The sky is filled with multi-colored gases that writhe and twist about as if possessing an alien intelligence. Beyond providing an amazing aerial display, this event has no effect on game play.

44 PLASMA VENTS

The surface is riddled with vents hissing and spewing multi-colored gases. These vents occasionally erupt violently, ejecting a dangerous blast of searing hot, semi-transparent plasma. At the start of the game (prior to deployment), players should take turns placing a total of 10 markers on the playing area indicating the location of plasma vents. These markers must be at least 10 inches apart and 10 inches from the edge of the playing area. At the start of each turn, roll D10 for each vent to determine which ones erupt. An erupting plasma vent affects all models within 5 inches and inflicts a [**Power:** 5, **AM:** –3] hit on each model affected.

45–47 LIGHTNING STORMS

The land is being savagely raked by an intense lightning storm. At the start of each turn, each player rolls D10; the player with the highest result randomly determines a model in his force to be struck by lightning. The victim takes a [**Power:** 6, **AM:** no test] hit and is automatically knocked prone.

48 INFESTED GROUND

The ground writhes and buckles from the herds of dugger maggots that have infested the soil in this area. These herds can number in the thousands, and they move through the soil like a school of fish. The ground in regions that harbor these creatures is unstable and constantly vibrates, making even mundane tasks difficult to perform. No attacks can be aimed during this game. Any attack roll of 9 or 10 counts as a critical failure.

49 VIRAL CLOUD

A large, dense, greenish-yellow cloud drifts onto the battlefield, endangering all units present. Use some type of marker to represent the viral cloud and place it in the center of the playing area. Any model within 3 inches of a viral cloud marker at any time must make a successful Body Test. On a failed test, the model is dissolved by the multitude of voracious diseases within the cloud and removed as a casualty. Roll D10 at the beginning of each turn to see what happens to the cloud.

1 Dispersal. The cloud disperses harmlessly and has no further effect on the game.

2–4 Standstill. The cloud remains in its current position.

5–7 Drift. The cloud drifts slowly. Use the scatter rules (see p. 84) to determine where it moves.

8–9 Rush. The cloud moves erratically. Use the scatter rules to determine where it moves, rolling for scatter twice.

10 Spawning. The viral cloud remains still and spawns a second cloud; the new viral cloud drifts away. Use the scatter rules to determine where it moves. You must now roll for each cloud at the beginning of each turn.

50–51 RAGING CYCLONE

An intensely powerful cyclone manifests on the battlefield. Make a 3-inch-diameter marker to represent the cyclone. At the start of each turn, use the scatter rules to determine the cyclone's movement (see p. 84), rolling for scatter twice. If the result of scatter moves the cyclone off the table, it leaves play for the remainder of the game. Whenever a model or any piece of terrain whose base horizontal dimensions are 12 x 12 inches or less is touched by the cyclone, roll D10 to determine its fate.

Models

1–3 Near miss. No effect.

4–7 Blown aside. The model is thrown D10 + 2 inches, measured from the center of the cyclone marker; use the scatter rules to determine the direction. If this move places the model inside the cyclone template, place the model on the nearest edge of the cyclone, outside the template. Thrown models are automatically knocked prone and take a [**Power:** 6, **AM:** 0] hit when they land.

8–10 Sucked in! The model is sucked up into the cyclone! Remove the model from the table and set it aside with any other models already in the cyclone. Roll D10 for each model in the cyclone at the start of each turn; on a 5 or less, that model is thrown out of the cyclone per the rules for Blown Aside.

Terrain

1–5 Sturdy ground. No effect.

6–10 Destroyed! If the terrain piece measures 12 or fewer inches wide or deep at its base, remove the piece from the playing area. Larger pieces of terrain are not affected.

52–53 BITTER COLD

The hellishly cold winds ripping through this area are a severe hazard to every living thing. Roll D10 for each model that doesn't move at least 2 inches during its activation. On a roll of 4 or less, the model is frozen solid and removed as a casualty.

54 INTERVENING ENTITY

An unknown entity manifests above the battlefield and issues a challenge to the most powerful model on the board (the model with the highest PV). The entity immobilizes all other models present until the conflict is resolved between itself and the challenged model. Roll D10 to determine the outcome of the battle.

1–2 Victory! The challenged model manages to best the entity, which vanishes as quickly as it appeared. If playing a campaign game, this model gets an automatic stat increase after the game (player's choice). All rules for increasing stats apply.

3–7 Battle on! The combatants continue to fight, locked in mortal combat! Roll again.

8–10 Defeat! The entity smites the challenging model. Remove the model as a casualty.

60–62 EARTHQUAKE

Worlds within the Maelstrom are frequently unstable and subject to earthquakes and other seismic activity. Roll D10 at the start of each turn to determine if the earth is shifting.

1–5 Tremors. Nothing but widespread tremors this turn. This has no effect on game play.

6–7 Minor quake. A small quake rocks the region, producing 1 crevasse (see below).

8–9 Major quake. A large quake violently shakes the area, creating 2 crevasses (see below).

10 Planetquake! A massive, worldwide quake threatens to destroy the entire area. This creates 3 crevasses on the battlefield (see below).

Crevasses: Each crevasse manifests as a 2-inch-wide chasm on the battlefield, crossing the playing area from one side to the other. To determine the placement of a crevasse, choose a long side of the battlefield and roll D100. Measure that many inches from one end of the playing area, and mark the edge. Repeat this for the other long side of the playing area, measuring from the same end of the table. Draw an imaginary line between the two points; anything within 1 inch of either side of the line is caught in the crevasse and must make a successful Dodge Test or plummet to its death. Ground vehicles are automatically destroyed if caught in a crevasse. Flying vehicles are not affected by earthquakes. Terrain caught by a crevasse is destroyed on a D10 roll of 5 or less.

55 TUNNELING TERROR

The ground shakes from the underground burrowing of the Nioga ram, a 50-foot-long subterranean creature that digs tunnels through the planets it inhabits, consuming the matter it gouges out of the ground. Any vehicle that moves more than half of its available MP must roll D10 to determine if it attracts the creature's attention. On a result of 5 or less, the Nioga ram attacks the vehicle, trying to pull it down and eat it. Roll another D10 and add the vehicle's Power; if the result equals 12 or more, the vehicle manages to pull itself free from the ram's jaws. On a result of 11 or less, remove the vehicle as a casualty.

56–59 ATMOSPHERIC PHENOMENA

The sky is filled with multi-colored gases that writhe and twist about as if possessing an alien intelligence. Beyond providing an amazing aerial display, this event has no effect on game play.

63 STASIS FLUX

The area is suffering severe time fluctuations. Each player should roll D10 prior to activating each unit during the game. A result of 1–7 means the unit may be used as normal; on a result of 8 or more, the unit is stuck in a time ripple that prevents it from acting this turn. The unit remains immobile and counts as paralyzed (see the Panic Table, p. 88) for purposes of melee attacks against it.

64 STEAM VENTS

Numerous steam vents dot the surface of this area, each puckered mound periodically shooting out a concussive blast of superheated steam. Players should take turns placing D10 markers on the playing area to indicate the location of the steam vents. Assign each marker a number, beginning at 1, as it is placed on the playing area. At the start of each turn, roll D10 to determine which steam vent will discharge (if the result is a number not assigned, no vent erupts that turn). When a steam vent discharges, center the round blast template over the vent marker. Any model caught under the template is pushed directly away from the vent, up to the edge of the template. If the model strikes any terrain or another model, it takes a [**Power:** 3, **AM:** 0] hit. When a large number of models are caught under the template, move the models on the outside first and work your way into the models closer to the vent. If a model's path to the edge of the template is blocked by another model, simply push both models directly outward until both are past the edge of the blast. Infantry can only push infantry of the same size or smaller. If a model hits an object that is larger than itself, it is knocked prone.

65 TECTONIC FRACTURE

The ground gives one quick, violent lurch as a major tectonic plate snaps deep underground. All infantry models are knocked prone. Vehicles are not affected by this result.

66–67 LIGHT GRAVITY

The gravity in this region is extremely light, allowing tremendous leaps. For 8 MP, models may make a low-gravity jump. Small and medium infantry models can jump 6 inches long and 3 inches high; large Infantry and walker vehicles can jump 8 inches long and 4 inches high. No models will take damage from falling during this game.

68 UNKNOWN ADVERSARIES

Multiple massive starcraft rip through the sky above the battlefield, exchanging broadside attacks at one another with powerful energy weapons. Roll D10 at the start of the second turn of the game to determine their actions.

1–5 Battle moves on. The ships continue on their way, savagely damaging one another with their endless attacks.

6–8 Stray shot. A stray blast from one of the ships hits the battlefield. The blast strikes a randomly determined location on the table. The blast has the following stats. [**Power:** 8, **AM:** –6, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 3", **Damage:** 2]

9–10 Destruction! One of the alien ships is seriously damaged and detonates overhead, showering the battlefield with flaming wreckage. The battlefield is bombarded by D10 pieces of flaming debris, which land at random locations. Each of these impacts has the following stats. [**Power:** 6, **AM:** –3, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 3"]

69–70 HEAVY GRAVITY

The gravity on this world is so intense that it severely restricts movement on the battlefield. Small and medium models may move no more than 4 inches. Large models may move no more than 6 inches. To move a model further than its restricted movement, make a Power Test. If the model fails the test, it loses all its remaining MP for the turn.

71–72 COSMIC STORM

Cosmic storms of one sort or another are a common occurance in the Maelstrom. Roll D10 at the start of the second turn to determine the nature of the storm.

1–2 No effect. The storm is too weak to have any effect on the game.

3–4 EMP storm. All vehicles are rendered useless this turn. Roll D10 for each vehicle at the start of each subsequent turn; on a result of 5 or less, the vehicle may be used as normal.

5–6 Gamma storm. All infantry melee attacks are at POW +1 (cumulative) for this game.

7–8 Solar storm. All infantry models reduce their BOD by 1 for the rest of this game.

9–10 No effect. The storm is too weak to have any real effect on the game.

73–76 ASTEROID FIELD

The planetoid that you are battling on enters an asteroid field. At the end of the first turn, roll D10 to determine the effect of the field.

1 Collision! A massive asteroid, hundreds of miles wide, emerges from the asteroid field and slams into your planetoid, utterly annihilating it upon impact. If this is a campaign game, any named models on the field are killed; remove them from your campaign roster.

2–3 Meteor storm. The immediate area is pelted by small asteroids piercing the atmosphere. D5 asteroids hit the battlefield in randomly determined locations. Each impact has the following stats. [**Power:** 8, **AM:** no test, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 3", **Damage:** 2]

4–6 Meteor shower. The battlefield is bombarded by D10 impacts from the debris created as smaller asteroids break apart on entering the atmosphere. This debris lands at randomly determined locations. Each of these impacts has the following stats. [**Power:** 6, **AM:** –3, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 3"]

7–10 No effect. The planetoid passes safely through the asteroid field.

77–78 HIGH ALTITUDE DETONATION

Something entering the atmosphere of the planet burns up in a brillant explosion, illuminating the ground below in a bright blue and green light. This has no effect on game play.

79–81 STELLAR WINDS

This area of land is subject to powerful interstellar winds that sweep across the landscape blasting everything in their path. Roll D10 at the start of each turn (before determining Initiative). On a result of 7 or less, the battlefield is raked by intense winds. Each unit on the battlefield must make a Knockdown Test. Roll D10 for each piece of terrain. On a result of 3 or less, the piece of terrain is removed from the playing area. See *Damaging Structures*, p. 87 in *Combat*, to determine the fate of any models caught in a piece of terrain that is destroyed.

82–83 CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE VEIL

This battlefield is on a planetoid located dangerously close to the Veil, and it is subject to being engulfed in the corrosive vapors for brief periods of time. Roll D10 at the start of each turn (before determining Initiative); on a result of 3 or less, the area is partially filled with the choking gasses of the Veil. During a turn in which this happens, the billowing clouds of gas prevent any ranged attacks beyond 12 inches. If the Veil engulfs the board more than once during the game, roll D10 for each model on the board at the end of each such turn after the first; on a result of 1 the model is removed from play as a casualty.

84 COSMIC DELUGE

A massive, drifting glob of liquid collides with the planetoid, engulfing the battlefield in a turbulent splash. Roll D10 for each model.

1–5 Splash. Though thoroughly drenched, the model manages to maintain its position on the battlefield. This has no game effect.

6–9 Flood. The powerful force of the liquid washes the model a short distance. Use the scatter rules (see p. 84) to determine the model's new position.

10 Washout! The model is washed away in the brief but intense flood that smashes into the region. Remove the model as a casualty.

85–88 INDUCTION

New worlds are periodically pulled into the Maelstrom. There is no rhyme or reason to this; no discernible schedule or pattern can be found. At the beginning of the second turn of the game, roll D10.

1–5 Safe distance. The new world enters the Maelstrom far off in the distance, appearing as just a flash in the sky. This has no effect on game play.

6–8 Close call! The newly inducted world materializes dangerously close and immediately breaks apart, showering the planetoid you're fighting on with debris. Use the rules for Asteroid Field (p. 103) to determine the outcome.

9–10 FUSION! Fusion is what inhabitants of worlds in the Outer Ring most fear. Players alternate replacing up to 2 pieces of terrain with the same number of new pieces. Roll to determine who replaces the first piece of terrain; that person chooses the theme of the new terrain, which the other players must follow. For example, the world being fused may be primarily woods, ice, jungle, crystal, water, alien structures and so on. If a model is on or in a piece of terrain that is replaced in the fusion, that model may make a Dodge Test to jump out of the way before the terrain changes. If the roll fails, the model is removed as a casualty.

89–90 TIME DISTORTION

A nearby "Maw storm" is causing disturbances in the flow of time within this area. The air itself can be seen to ripple and waver as a result. Roll D10 when you activate a unit; on a result of 3 or less, that unit is experiencing slowed time and only gets half (rounded up) its normal MP this turn. Treat a slowed model as having Close Combat 1 for purposes of determining whether it or another model gets a bonus in a melee attack.

91–92 COSMIC DETONATION

A massive detonation in space rocks the battlefield! The intense flash from the explosion lights up a portion of the sky, making it difficult to look that direction. Randomly determine an edge of the playing field for the location of the detonation. Any model facing this direction when making a ranged attack suffers –1 RC. In addition, a ranged attack roll result of 9 or 10 will count as a critical failure if the model is facing the designated table edge when it makes the attack.

93–95 CORE ROAR

A demonic, ear-splitting, bestial roar cuts through the air. The horrible sound seems to come from everywhere at once, and it's impossible to discern the direction of its origin. This result has no effect on the game.

100 MAW TENDRIL

Second only to the Maw itself for destructive potential, the Maw tendrils are horrifyingly powerful concentrations of energy. The tendrils are known to whip around, raking worlds with their devastating power. Often, the world they touch is destroyed outright, but fantastic and bizarre effects occasionally occur instead. Roll D10 to determine the effect of the tendril.

1–6 Mutated landscape. Roll twice on the Battle Terrain Table and combine the effects.

7–9 Warped reality. Roll three times on the Battle Terrain Table and combine the effects.

10 Annihilation! The world that you're battling on is lashed by a Maw tendril and it blows apart under the stress. In campaign games, all named models on the battlefield are lost. If not playing a campaign game, treat this result as Warped Reality (above).

CAMPAIGN RULES

Running a *VOR* campaign involves building and developing a force over the course of many campaign scenarios. The more battles a campaign force wins, the more skilled and experienced it becomes. A force that consistently loses becomes less effective over time.

GETTING STARTED

To begin a campaign, each player who will be involved chooses a faction or race to play (growlers, zykhee, Union and so on). The player must use a force belonging to that race or faction every time he participates in a campaign game, though specific units used may change for each game. Think of the player's total forces as similar to a football team; during each play (battle) he uses only a fraction of his players on the field, but he can draw from his larger team for future plays.

Any game of *VOR* can be played as a campaign game if all participants are in the campaign and they all agree to make the game a campaign match. In this case, the game is played as usual, but the players can make use of earned Force Traits (see p. 106) and named models (p. 108), and must follow the other rules found in this section.

At the end of a campaign game, each player's force earns Campaign Points (CP) based on the level of success they achieved (see *Campaign Point Awards*, this page). These points can be used to purchase Force Traits or improve named models. In the next campaign game, the players must play the same race/faction, but can choose an entirely different force. Whatever units they choose, they will have access to their Force Traits and named models until they decide to retire the force from play or the campaign ends by mutual consent of the players.

Each player will use a campaign record sheet (see scenario book) to keep track of his force's successes and/or failures over the course of the campaign. The campaign record sheet provides space for the following information: number of games played, total Campaign Points, available Campaign Points, Force Traits, named models and notes.

CHOOSING FORCES

At the beginning of each campaign scenario, each player chooses their force for that game. Unless a specific scenario calls for uneven forces, a campaign game should be played with balanced forces. Forces of the same Point Value will be roughly equal. The players should choose a certain Point Value for the game, and each player's starting force should be built with that number of points.

Games can have any Point Value the players want. As a general guideline, a small (and therefore short) game would be around 400 points, a medium-sized game would give each player 600 points and a large (and therefore long) game can be played with 800 points of forces or more.

Players may intentionally choose to field a force with a lesser Point Value than they are allowed for the scenario in the hopes of winning an *underdog bonus* (see below).

A force's effective Point Value may be increased or decreased if it has a positive or negative Resources trait; see *Resources*, p. 106.

DETERMINING VICTORY

In standard games of *VOR*, it's easy to determine the winner and loser of a given battle simply by comparing the Glory Point totals of all the players involved (see *Winning the Game*, p. 74). In campaign play, however, it's important to know just how sweeping a victory was or how devastating a loss, since this determines Campaign Point awards and Resources trait increases or decreases.

The Victory Table (p. 106) shows the various levels of victory and how to achieve them. The basic conditions of victory still apply; if you have more Glory Points than your opponent, you are considered to have scored a victory. If you have less, you suffered a defeat.

The specific kind of victory or defeat is determined by how many casualties your own side suffered, in terms of the percentage of your side's total Point Value that was killed. For example, if you had 500 points of units at the beginning of the game, and only 250 points survived at the end, you would have suffered 50 percent losses.

CAMPAIGN POINT AWARDS

The Victory Table shows the number of Campaign Points earned based on the level of your force's success or failure. Scenarios may also offer additional victory conditions worth Campaign Points, such as specific goals or objectives.

Underdog Bonus

A player may end up with a lower Point Value total than his enemy, either because of differing Resources traits (see *Resources*, p. 106) or because he has lots of bravado and wants to try to win with an inferior force.

Regardless of the reasons, a player who fields an inferior force earns extra Campaign Points provided he scores a victory (nothing extra is gained or lost in defeat). The award is based on the difference between the inferior force's total Point Value and the opponent's Point Value total. Subtract the total Point Value of the inferior force from the total Point Value of the larger force, and compare the remainder to the Point Value of the larger force. For every full 10 percent of the value of the larger army, the inferior force scores 1 extra Campaign Point (if it wins), up to a maximum of +5 Campaign Points.

For example, a player is fielding a 600-point force against his opponent's 800-point force. The difference between the two point values is 200 (800 – 600 = 200). Comparing 200 to 800 yields a result of 25 percent (200 ÷

800 = 0.25). This is more than 20 percent, but not 30 percent, so if he wins the battle he will score an extra 2 Campaign Points.

VICTORY TABLE

Situation	Victory Level	Campaign Points
Victory: Glory Point total higher than opponent		
Lost less than 50 percent of your force *and* Glory Point total double or more than that of opponent	Major Victory	5/+1 Resources
Lost less than 50 percent of your force	Solid Victory	4
Lost 50 percent or more of your force	Marginal Victory	3
Defeat: Glory Point total lower than opponent		
Lost less than 50 percent of your force	Marginal Defeat	3
Lost 50 percent or more of your force	Solid Defeat	2
Lost 50 percent or more of your force *and* Glory Point total is half or less than that of opponent	Major Defeat	1/–1 Resources

MULTIPLAYER GAMES

For campaign games with more than two opponents, each player receives 1 Campaign Point just for having the courage to get involved in such madness and mayhem.

Only the single highest Glory Point score among all players is considered to have achieved victory. All other players suffer a defeat. To determine if a Major Victory or Defeat was scored, compare your Glory Points to the average Glory Point total of all opponents.

Underdog Bonus: Calculate the average Point Value of the opponents' forces. The result is the value you use when determining an underdog bonus.

FORCE TRAITS

Force Traits are qualities that enhance a force's effectiveness in battle. They are purchased with accumulated Campaign Points, and affect your entire force regardless of what units you field. This section defines each trait and describes the advantages they provide in a campaign. Forthcoming force books for each race in the game will describe additional special abilities a force can use in campaign play.

STRATEGY

Strategy indicates how effective a force is in setting up for a battle. Players add their Strategy to the rolls made to choose a deployment zone and determine the order of set-up.

Cost to improve: 10 CP per point

TACTICS

Tactics reflects a force's skill at adjusting their plans and compensating for the actions of their enemies in the heat of battle. Tactics is added to a player's Initiative Roll each turn, making forces with high Tactics the ones most likely to go first each turn.

Cost to improve: 20 CP per point

MORALE

The more seasoned a force is, the more likely its units will keep their cool in battle. Each point of Morale allows the player to re-roll one failed Morale Test per game.

Cost to improve: 10 CP per point

LUCK

Luck is a deciding factor in many military conflicts. Each point of Luck allows a player to re-roll one failed to-hit roll, roll to inflict damage or Armor Test per game.

Cost to improve: 20 CP per point

RESOURCES

Resources represent a leader's access to reinforcements and supplies. A force with a non-zero Resources Trait will have access to more or less points than the basic point level agreed upon for the game.

After choosing a point level, increase the points available to a player's force by 5 percent for each point of Resources above 0, or decrease it by 5 percent for each point of Resources below 0. For example, if a force has a Resources Trait of 2 and is playing a 500-point game, the player could choose up to 550 points of units. If the force had a Resources Trait of –4, he could choose no more than 400 points of units.

If your force's Resources Trait drops into the low negative numbers, you may want to consider retiring the force. Once it drops to –20, you can't field any units at all, so your force is wiped out completely!

Resources cannot be purchased. This force trait can only be earned by winning a Major Victory. Resources can also be lost by suffering a Major Defeat (this trait can have a negative value).

Cost to improve: Not applicable

NAMED MODELS

For the cost of 1 Campaign Point, you can name a model. Once a model is named, you can spend additional Campaign Points to improve its stats and increase its effectiveness in the game.

Any model in your force can become a named model, whether it's an individual or part of a squad. Named models that are part of a squad remain with that squad after they are named.

You must give a named model a unique appearance, anything from a dramatically different paint scheme to an actual conversion of the miniature itself, so that your opponent can immediately identify your named models. In order to track its improvements, a named model's stats also must be added to the campaign record sheet.

DEVELOPING NAMED MODELS

To improve a named model's stats (except MP and LIF), you choose the stat you want to try to improve, spend 1 Campaign Point and roll D10. If the result is higher than the current stat you are trying to improve, you have succeeded and should add 1 to that stat. You can only attempt to raise a single stat on a model each game, though you may attempt to improve more than one model each game.

To increase MP or LIF costs 5 Campaign Points; no die roll to succeed is required.

Only models that participated in your most recent game can be named or, if they are already named, improved. If you want to improve a specific model by spending Campaign Points as described above, you must do so after a game in which that model fought, and before the next game using that force.

Improvement Limits

Though named models stand above the rest, even they have their limits. Use the following limits when improving a named model's statistics.

- All statistics (except MP and LIF) can be increased twice. Even if a model suffers a wound effect that reduces a stat, a stat can only ever receive two increases (you don't get "extra" stat increases to counteract wound effects).
- MP and LIF can only be increased once each. Even if a model suffers a wound effect that reduces MP, the stat can only ever receive one increase.
- No statistic can be raised higher than 10 in any case.

DEATH AND WOUNDING

Named models are tougher than their more common counterparts, but can also suffer permanent injury. When a named model takes damage equal to or greater than its Lifeforce statistic, it is not necessarily killed. Remove the model from play, but roll D10 and consult the Named Model Damage Table below to see how wounded it actually is. No matter what the result, the model is still counted as a "kill" for your opponent's Glory Points.

Note that the example effects on the Wound Table are based on a humanoid model; equivalent effects can be devised for non-humanoid models, though the stat reductions stay the same.

NAMED MODEL DAMAGE TABLE

Die Roll Result	Effect
1–3	**Survived!** The model somehow managed to avoid death and may be used as normal in future games. Consider the model to have 1 point of Lifeforce remaining.
4–5	**Wounded!** The model managed to survive its battlefield ordeal, but at a price. The model can be used in future games, but roll D10 and consult the Wound Table to find the lasting effects of the injury. Wound Table results are permanent changes to the model's stats.
6–10	**Dead!** The model succumbed to its injuries and is killed. It must be removed from the campaign record sheet. This model is no longer available for your games.

WOUND TABLE

Die Roll Result	Example Wound Effect	Stat Reduction
1–2	Nothing more than scars!	—
3	Broken Leg	–1 MP
4	Smashed Hand	–1 CC
5	Lost an Eye	–1 RC
6	Back Strain	–1 POW
7	Internal Bleeding	–1 BOD
8	Concussion	–1 BRN
9	Beaten Spirit	–1 GUT
10	Roll again twice on this table (re-roll a 10)	—

CUSTOM FORCE CREATION

The Maelstrom has pulled an untold number of worlds into its grasp from across time and space, each populated by unique species that inevitably become locked in struggle with their new neighbors. In this seething cosmic melting pot, any race of beings imaginable can appear without warning. In the Maelstrom, the potential list of enemies is endless.

OVERVIEW

It's doubtful that you could find a single war gamer who wasn't excited by the concept of creating and fielding their own custom-built force—in *VOR: The Maelstrom*, you can! This concept has been an integral aspect of the game since its beginnings, as the setting allows for literally any kind of force to appear. Though we don't have nearly enough room in this main box set to give you every conceivable rule necessary to convert every model you may desire, these rules should be sufficient to get you started. We do intend to publish a more extensive set of custom force creation rules at a later time. Until then, we hope you enjoy tinkering with these guidelines. If there are key elements that you would like to see included in the full version of the scratch-built force rules, then please send them in so we can check 'em out.

Your custom-built forces should be able to face FASA-published forces on an equal footing in game play, provided you follow our advice for force creation regarding force composition, model abilities and so on. However, you shouldn't expect the forces you build with these rules to be directly comparable to the forces we've presented as part of the *VOR* universe. In order to simplify the whole process, abilities of units had to be generalized, while each force created specifically for *VOR* has been extensively playtested and tweaked to fine-tune their abilities and point costs.

The process of creating your own force requires you to follow the steps below. First you need to invent a force concept and structure, then you need to define the specific units and their statistics and attack options. By the time you finish with them, you'll have the details necessary to field your new force.

A NOTE ON RACE

The forces defined as part of the *VOR* universe are very race-specific. It is unlikely, for example, that a growler and zykhee combined force would ever come into being. These custom force design rules were created with that principle in mind—each force is intended to belong to a specific race. However, we know that some players may wish to create custom mixed-race forces, which is fine by us. Though the only

thing most species in the Maelstrom have in common is a desire to kill each other, it is possible that ragtag elements of various races may group together for survival or mercenary purposes. Whatever your force type, the following rules may be used.

FORCE CONCEPT

The limitless potential of the Maelstrom allows players to create any sort of custom force that sparks their imagination. Any type of race, unit or even individual model that a player ever wanted to field in a miniatures game is now possible.

You can approach your force concept in several ways. You may choose to base your force concept on models you already own, models you have seen at your local hobby shop or any appropriately-sized figures that you've always thought would look cool on a game board. You may have a specific background, set of skills or type of weapon in mind, and just need to choose miniatures to make your concept come alive. You may even have a favorite force from another miniatures game that you want to translate to *VOR*, to see how they stack up.

Whether you choose to field a high-tech, mercenary militia of power-armored warriors, a fierce alien tribe of hunters, a brutal, ragtag horde of space goblins or some other unique force, all you need to start are the appropriate miniatures.

Once you have chosen your concept and have access to the miniatures, you must determine your force structure.

Stacy has decided that she wants to make her own race/force for VOR: The Maelstrom. She's going to base her new force on a spider theme as she has been collecting spider miniatures for a number of years and she has a substantial collection to select from. The name of the race will be "the Arachnians." The race won't use any technological devices and will rely on their own natural abilities in battle.

FORCE STRUCTURE

Though the elements in each *VOR* force vary dramatically, each force has a similar composition. In other words, each model may have unique abilities, and each race will have a unique culture and history, but each force will have a leader, unskilled infantry, elite infantry, individual specialists and some type of transportation.

The following information describes the types of units you can create for your force. When you have chosen the types of units your force will include, go to *Unit Creation*.

LEADER

The leader model represents the head of your custom force. It can be the General, King, Lord, Mandarin, Mother, Chieftain or any other historical or fictional leadership title. In keeping with its position as the head of the force, this model should be substantially more deadly in game play than any other model. A leader model is always optional for a force.

Your force may include one leader model.

BASIC SQUAD

The basic squad is the defining element of your force. If the force you are creating is representative of a race, then the basic squad should be composed primarily of typical members of that race. If you are creating a mercenary force, each basic squad may consist of a variety of model sizes and races.

Your force may include up to 3 types of basic squads.

ELITE SQUAD

An elite squad has the same makeup as a basic squad, but has a higher level of skill and so is more effective. They generally have a higher Point Value, and so you will be able to use fewer of them per game than a basic squad. The Elite squads on the table can never outnumber the basic squads.

Your force may include up to 3 types of elite squads.

INDIVIDUALS

Individual models have specialized abilities and, because they do not need to be part of a squad in order to be effective in battle, offer greater flexibility for use in play. Individuals generally have a higher Point Value than models in basic or elite squads, and as such you can use fewer of them per game than squad models. You can't have more individual models on the board than squads.

Your force may include up to 2 types of individuals.

VEHICLES

Vehicles fulfill a wide variety of roles in military forces, including transport, support and reconnaissance. Tailor the use of your vehicles to reflect the overall concept of your force. You can never have more vehicles than squads on the table.

Your force may include up to 3 types of vehicle.

Based on the models that she has available, Stacy decides to have 1 leader (a big Queen spider), 2 basic squads (small- and medium-sized spiders), 1 elite squad (super-venomous medium-sized spiders), 1 type of large individual hulking spider and, last but not least, 1 transport vehicle (this is actually a big, hollowed-out bug creature).

UNIT CREATION

In this step, you will further define each of your force's units, including size, squad structure, vehicle locomotion and unit statistics.

DETERMINE UNIT MODEL SIZE

For each unit you have, you must choose a size for the models in that unit. A model may be defined as small, medi-

um or large (see *Model Sizes,* p. 73). The size of a model determines its base statistics (see *Unit Statistics,* below).

All the models in a squad must be the same size, but the same type of squads may have different size models. For example, in a force with two basic squads, one may contain small models and one may contain large models.

Each type of individual unit may be a different size. Frequently, but depending on race, leader models are large.

DETERMINE SQUAD STRUCTURE

Choose a squad structure for each squad by determining the number of models that may be in the squad type. Choose either 2–4 models or 5–10 models for structure. All squads have a 3-inch coherency (see *Squad Coherency,* p. 77).

VEHICLE CLASSIFICATION

Determine if each vehicle moves using wheels or tracks, or walks or flies. Classify each vehicle as light, medium or heavy (see *Vehicle Types and Sizes,* p. 89).

You can also designate one or more of your vehicles as a transport vehicle for no additional cost. By designating a vehicle as a transport you limit its weapon load. Transport vehicles can only have 2 basic weapons incorporated into their design. The carrying capacity for these transport vehicles depends on the type of vehicle it is, as shown below:

Light Transport: 5 small or medium models
Medium Transport: 10 small or medium models
Heavy Transport: 15 small or medium models

UNIT STATISTICS

The statistics for each unit type are based on a standard set of stats based on the model's size, as noted on the Base/Maximum Statistics Table above. Each model size and unit type also has a stat maximum, listed on the same tables. Beginning with the base stat line, you can alter the stats of each unit with either positive or negative adjustments. Each point that you raise or lower a unit's stat will affect the model's Point Value, as indicated on the Statistic Cost Table. An individual stat cannot be lowered to less than 1, nor can it be raised above the value listed on the stat maximum line for its unit type and size.

Remember that a unit's Point Value is the Point Value *per model.*

Adjust each unit's statistics as desired, then determine the total cost of the changes for each unit. Each unit must have a minimum PV of 5. If the final calculated Point Value of a unit is lower than 5, its Point Value is 5.

Only Basic Attacks: If a model is given no attack options (see p. 113) other than its basic stats (it makes unarmed melee attacks only), it gets a –3 PV reduction.

Stacy starts to devise stats for her models. Beginning with the Queen (a large model), Stacy writes down the

BASE/MAXIMUM STATISTICS TABLE

	MP	CC	RC	POW	BOD	BRN	GUT	LIF	AR
Small Models									
Base Stats	12	3	3	2	2	3	3	1	0
Squad Max.	12	6	6	4	4	7	7	1	5
Individual Max.	12	7	7	5	5	8	8	2	5
Leader Max.	12	8	8	5	5	9	9	2	5
Medium Models									
Base Stats	10	3	3	3	3	4	4	1	0
Squad Max.	12	6	6	5	5	7	7	1	6
Individual Max.	12	7	7	5	5	8	8	2	6
Leader Max.	12	8	8	6	6	9	9	3	6
Large Models									
Base Stats	8	3	3	3	3	3	4	2	0
Squad Max.	10	6	6	6	6	7	7	3	7
Individual Max.	10	7	7	7	7	8	8	4	7
Leader Max.	12	8	8	7	7	9	9	5	7

STATISTIC COST TABLE

Statistic	Cost to Increase/Decrease 1 point
Move Points (MP)	4/–4 PV
Close Combat (CC)	1/–1 PV
Ranged Combat (RC)	2/–1 PV
Power (POW)	2/–1 PV
Body (BOD)	3/–2 PV
Brains (BRN)	1/–1 PV
Guts (GUT)	1/–1 PV
Lifeforce (LIF)	8/–8 PV
Armor Rating (AR)	3/0 PV
Attack options use base stats only (p. 113)	(–3 PV)

basic stats for a large model from the Base/Maximum Statistics Table. She thinks the Queen should have a higher MP, and decides to take it up to 10 (base 8, plus 2). Looking at the Statistic Cost Table, she sees that each MP increase adds 4 PV, so the Queen is now at +8 PV (4 x 2).

Stacy also decides to raise the Queen's CC to 6 (a +3 increase from the base 3, adding 3 x 1 = 3 PV), RC to 4 (a +1 increase, adding 2 PV), POW 6 (a +3 increase, adding another 3 x 2 = 6 PV), BOD 6 (+3 increase, for +9 PV), BRN 6 (+3 increase, + 3 PV), GUT 7 (+3 increase, +3 PV), LIF 3 (+1, for +8 PV) and AR 4 (+4, adding +12 PV). When she's finished, she takes a quick sec to check and make sure none of those increases exceed the maximum allowed.

So far, she has a total PV of 54 (8 + 3 + 2 + 6 + 9 + 3 + 3 + 8 + 12). The Queen's stats are:

***MP:** 10 **CC:** 6 **RC:** 4 **POW:** 6 **BOD:** 6 **BRN:** 6 **GUT:** 7 **LIF:** 3 **AR:** 4 **SIZE:** L*

Having completed the Queen, Stacy decides to define the stats for a squad next. Stacy's first basic squad is going to be called a skitter squad, and will have 5–10 small models. She decides to give them stats of:

***MP:** 12 **CC:** 4 **RC:** 2 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 3 **BRN:** 4 **GUT:** 5 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 0 **SIZE:** S*

These changes from the base stats add up to a total of 8 PV (+1 CC = +1 PV, –1 RC = –1 PV, +1 POW = +2 PV, +1 BOD = +3 PV, +1 BRN = +1 PV and +2 GUT = +2 PV). She decides that these cannon fodder squads will have no other attacks besides basic unarmed melee attacks, which applies a –3 PV modifier. This reduces the PV to 5 (8 – 3), which is the minimum PV a unit can have.

Stacy then proceeds to define stats for her other units.

VEHICLE COMBAT STATS TABLE

Type	PV Cost
Ranged Combat	
3	+9
4	+12
5	+15
6	+18
Close Combat	
3	+5
4	+7
5	+9
6	+12

VEHICLE STATISTICS TABLE

	MP	TC	POW	BOD	LIF	AR(SHD)	PV
Medium Vehicles							
Wheeled	18	2	6	7	4	5(2)	70
Tracked	15	2	7	7	4	5(2)	80
Walker	10	2	7	7	4	5(2)	75
Flyer	20	2	7	6	3	5(2)	85
Light Vehicles							
Wheeled	20	1	5	6	3	4(2)	45
Tracked	25	1	6	6	3	4(2)	55
Walker	15	1	6	6	3	4(2)	50
Flyer	25	1	6	5	2	4(2)	60
Heavy Vehicles							
Wheeled	10	3	7	8	5	6(3)	105
Tracked	10	3	8	8	5	6(3)	125
Walker	8	3	8	8	5	6(3)	110
Flyer	15	3	8	7	4	5(3)	150

Vehicle Stats

Vehicle statistics can be found by referencing the type and size on the Vehicle Statistics Table (this page). Unlike infantry-based units, all vehicle types use standard statistics; they cannot be modified.

The Close and Ranged Combat stats of a vehicle have to be purchased separately from the vehicle itself. Walkers are the only type of vehicle that can have a Close Combat stat. If a vehicle has no weaponry you do not have to purchase a Ranged Combat stat for it. Use the Vehicle Combat Stats Table for determining how much these stats will add to the vehicle's PV.

Designing the Arachnian vehicle, Stacy calls it a "tow beetle," as it is basically a large, domesticated beetle with a hollowed-out thorax. Stacy decides to classify it as a medium walker transport, meaning it can transport 10 small or medium models. Since the basic stats can't be modified, she pulls them right off the Vehicle Statistics Table.

Since the tow beetle is a walker, Stacy decides to go ahead and give it a CC stat of 5. This adds 9 PV, giving it a total of 84 (base 75 + 9).

ATTACK OPTIONS

Unless a unit engages in combat only using unremarkable unarmed melee

attacks, it will have attack options of some sort. These options can range from standard issue equipment (guns, knives or other weapons) to innate capabilities such as optic blasts, huge claws or the ability to create mini-earthquakes. Certain units may have even more esoteric options, such as unique types of movement and shields of flame, or specialized rifles and chemical delivery systems.

You should tailor the attack options you give a model to fit the model's physical design and race. For example, if the model depicts a space troll wielding a combat axe and a laser pistol, the attack options should involve using an axe, using a laser pistol, and/or some other option that makes intuitive sense for a troll. Giving the troll a mental blast attack option doesn't make sense (unless it belongs to a race of psychic space trolls …).

All units can make basic unarmed melee attacks; this is a free attack option and does not count toward a unit's attack option limits.

ATTACK OPTION LIMITS

Each type of unit can only have a specific number of attack options, as described below. These attacks are classified as standard and heavy, depending on their Power (see the Attack Options Table).

The Leader

Your leader model may have up to 3 attack options. Up to 2 of the leader's attacks may be heavy.

Basic Squad

Each basic squad can have up to 2 standard attack options. All models in the squad must have the same attacks, except that one model may have a different attack, and it may be heavy. This represents the common military doctrine of grouping soldiers with similar abilities in the same unit.

Elite Squad

Each elite squad model can have up to 2 attack options; only one of these attacks may be heavy. Each model in the squad may have different attacks, unlike basic squads.

Individuals

An individual model can have up to 2 attack options. Only one of these attacks may be heavy.

ATTACK OPTIONS TABLE

CLOSE COMBAT

Type	Power	AM	MP Cost*	PV Cost
Standard	POW	0	+0	0
Standard	POW	–1	+1	1
Standard	POW	–2	+2	2
Standard	POW +1	0	+0	2
Standard	POW +1	–1	+1	3
Standard	POW +1	–2	+2	4
Standard	POW +2	0	+1	4
Heavy	POW +2	–1	+2	5
Heavy	POW +2	–2	+3	6
Heavy	POW +3	0	+1	7
Heavy	POW +3	–1	+2	8
Heavy	POW +3	–2	+3	10
Heavy	POW +4	0	+1	10
Heavy	POW +4	–1	+2	12
Heavy	POW +4	–2	+3	15

RANGED COMBAT

Type	Power	AM	MP Cost	PV Cost
Standard	3	0	3	2
Standard	3	–1	3	3
Standard	3	–2	4	5
Standard	4	0	4	4
Standard	4	–1	4	5
Standard	4	–2	5	7
Standard	5	0	5	6
Heavy	5	–1	5	8
Heavy	5	–2	6	12
Heavy	6	0	6	10
Heavy	6	–1	6	14
Heavy	6	–2	7	20
Heavy	7	0	7	20
Heavy	7	–1	7	25
Heavy	7	–2	8	30

OTHER MODIFIERS

1" blast radius	+4 PV
2" blast radius	+8 PV
Indirect	+5 PV
Splash	+5 PV
Full-auto	+6 PV
2 Uses/Turn	+10 PV
2 Damage**	(total PV x 1.5, minimum +10 PV)
3 Damage**	(total PV x 2, minimum +20 PV)
Primary attack (see p. 114)	–(total PV x .1, minimum value 2) PV

*Add to MP cost of standard attack
**Only available for heavy attacks

Vehicles

The number of attacks a vehicle may have depends on whether the player chooses standard or heavy attacks. Light and medium vehicles can have 1 heavy attack or 2 standard attacks. Heavy vehicles can have 2 heavy attacks or 4 standard attacks. Transport vehicles, no matter their size, can only have 2 standard attacks. Only walkers may have Close Combat attacks.

Stacy wants to keep her attack options simple. The Queen Arachnian needs to be tough, so she gives the model 2 standard close combat attacks and 1 heavy ranged attack. She's already decided that the skitter squads only have a basic unarmed attack, which fits their role as cheap, expendable troops. The weaver squads are intended to be the "standard" example of an Arachnian, but Stacy doesn't want them to be too expensive either so she can use lots of them in her games. For this reason she gives them a only a single standard close combat attack. The venomlords are intended to be the nasty and deadly squad for the force, so they get 2 attacks (1 standard close combat and 1 heavy ranged attack) to make them as versatile as possible. The storm spider is a massive, hulking model, and Stacy decides that a single heavy close combat ability suits it best.

With these decisions in mind, Stacy is starting to get a clear picture of how her force is shaping up.

PRIMARY ATTACK

Each model must select one of its attack options as its primary attack. Any other attack options that the model may have are considered secondary. A primary attack option *must* be taken with the model whenever it is used in the game. To represent this, the PV of the primary attack is added to the model's total PV.

Because the primary attack option is integral to the model, the attack's PV is reduced by 10 percent (with a minimum modifier of –2 PV). Calculate this reduction after all other PV modifications have been made (including damage).

Secondary attack options are available to a model whenever they are used in a game, but they don't have to be taken. It's the player's choice whether to purchase secondary attacks for a game or not. This allows you to customize the units you make for each battle they play in.

ATTACK STATISTICS

The Attack Options Table, p. 113, provides the information you need to choose attack types for your units. Each attack listed gives a Power, armor modifier, type and MP Cost for the attack. The PV Bonus for attacks is added to the PV of the unit (each model, in the case of squads).

All attacks have a minimum PV of 2. Any attack which ends up with a final PV lower than 2 has a PV of 2.

Melee Attacks

The Power of a model's melee attack is based on the POW of the model, plus a modifier. The melee attack Power cannot be less than the model's POW.

Any melee attack with a Power of 6 (calculating the model's POW plus its modifier) or higher is considered a heavy attack.

Attack Range

The Attack Ranges Table provides the available weapon ranges and modifiers. Choose a set of ranges and adjust the weapon cost according to the PV Modifier given. Splash attacks do not use ranges.

ATTACK RANGES TABLE

Range (S/M/L)	Range Modifiers	PV Modifier
4/8/—	+1/—/—	–2
4/8/—	+2/–1/—	–2
6/12/—	+1/—/—	–1
6/12/—	+2/–1/—	–1
5/10/20	+1/—/–1	0
5/10/20	—/+1/—	0
6/12/24	+1/—/–1	+1
6/12/24	—/+1/—	+1
10/20/30	+1/—/–1	+2
10/20/30	—/+1/—	+2
15/30/45	+1/—/–1	+4
15/30/45	—/+1/—	+4
20/40/60	+1/—/–1	+6
20/40/60	—/+1/—	+6

Uses Per Turn

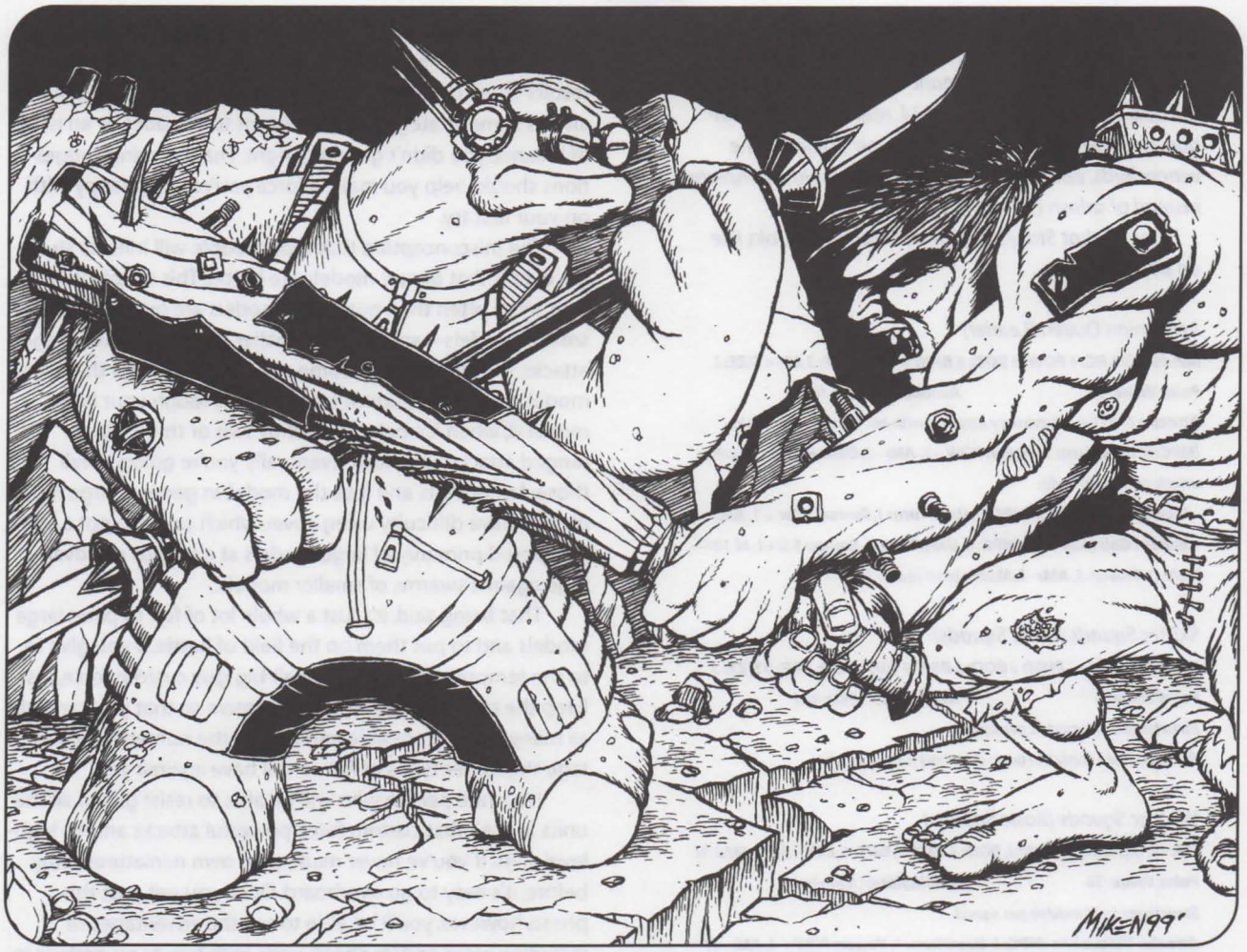
All attack options can be used once per turn at no PV change. An attack can be raised to 2 Uses/Turn for +10 PV. Heavy attacks can only have 1 Use/Turn.

Special Characteristics

There are four special characteristics that can be added to ranged attacks: splash, full-auto, indirect and blast. Each one adds to the PV of the attack. If an attack is taken as splash or full-auto, it cannot also have another characteristic. If a weapon is taken as indirect, it must also be taken as blast. However, a weapon taken as blast does not necessarily have to be taken as indirect.

Attack Damage

All attacks (whether standard or heavy) inflict 1 point of damage at no extra PV. You can increase the damage of heavy attacks to 2 points by increasing the attack's PV by 50 percent, with a minimum PV modifier of +10. To increase a heavy attack to 3 points of damage costs double the stan-



dard PV (minimum +20). Calculate this PV increase after all other modifications to the attack's PV have been made (except for it being a primary attack).

For example, you create a heavy attack option with a PV of 20. To raise its damage to 2 would add +10 PV (20 x .5 = 10). To raise its damage to 3 instead would add +20 PV for a final attack cost of 40 PV.

Standard attacks can never cause more than 1 damage point.

Now Stacy has to decide exactly what all her units' attack options are going to be. She knows that if she's not careful at this stage she could balloon the PV cost of her units by creating extremely expensive attacks.

*Starting with the weaver squads, she decides their one standard melee attack will be a vicious bite attack. After examining the table she settles on attack stats of: [**Power:** POW + 1, **AM:** –2, **MPC:** 5]. Since weavers have a POW of 4, the Power of the attack is 5, and so classified as standard, not heavy. The PV of this attack is normally 4, but since it is the weaver's primary attack, the PV is reduced by 2. The final attack PV (2, the minimum PV possible), is added to the weaver's Point Value.*

*Stacy gives her elite venomlord squad the same standard melee bite attack as the weavers, and also makes it their primary attack. For their heavy ranged attack option, she decides they can spit venom. She chooses stats of [**Power:** 5, **AM:** –2, **MPC:** 6] from the table, at +12 PV. She also decides that it will use the splash template (+5 PV). So the venomlords have two attack options: a primary bite (2 PV, added to the models' PV) and a secondary venom spit (+17 PV).*

*Moving on to the storm spider, she chooses stats of [**Power:** POW +2, **AM:** –2, **MPC:** 6] for its primary melee attack, costing 6 PV. Because the effective Power of the attack is 8 (POW 6 + 2), it counts as a heavy attack. This attack is described as using horrible, serrated mandibles to shred opponents. She thinks this deadly attack should inflict 2 points of damage. This raises its PV to 16 (6 x 1.5 is +3, but the minimum is +10). Because it's the storm spiders primary attack, however, the PV is reduced to 14 (16 – 2).*

Finally, for the Queen, Stacy chooses to give it attacks equivalent to the vicious bite and shredding mandibles. She makes the mandibles the primary attack; the attacks have a PV of 4 and 14, respectively. In addition, she gives the Queen a venom spit similar to the venomlords, except that it uses the 2-inch blast template instead of splash (+20 PV).

Here's what Stacy's final Arachnian force looks like on paper:

Arachnian Queen (Leader)

***MP:** 10 **CC:** 6 **RC:** 4 **POW:** 6 **BOD:** 6 **BRN:** 6 **GUT:** 7 **LIF:** 3 **AR:** 4 **SIZE:** L*

***Point Value:** 68* ***Availability:** 1 per force*

***Attacks:** The Queen's primary attack is with her massive mandibles [**MPC:** 6, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Power:** POW +2, **AM:** –2, **Damage:** 2]. Her other attack options include:*

***Vicious Bite (+4 PV):** [**MPC:** 5, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Power:** POW + 1, **AM:** –2]*

***Venom Gob (+20 PV):** [**MPC:** 6, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 5/+1, **M** 10/—, **L** 20/–1, **Power:** 5, **AM:** –2, **Mode:** blast radius 2"].*

Skitter Squads (Basic Squads)

***MP:** 12 **CC:** 4 **RC:** 2 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 3 **BRN:** 4 **GUT:** 5 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 0 **SIZE:** S*

***Point Value:** 5* ***Availability:** Unlimited*

***Structure:** 5–10 models per squad*

***Attacks:** None (only the basic unarmed melee attack).*

Weaver Squads (Basic Squads)

***MP:** 12, **CC:** 4, **RC:** 3, **POW:** 4, **BOD:** 4, **BRN:** 5, **GUT:** 6, **LIF:** 1, **AR:** 3, **SIZE:** M*

***Point Value:** 28* ***Availability:** Unlimited*

***Structure:** 5–10 models per squad*

***Attacks:** Vicious bite [**MPC:** 5, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Power:** POW + 1, **AM:** –2]*

Venomlord Squads (Elite Squads)

***MP:** 12 **CC:** 5 **RC:** 4 **POW:** 4 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 6 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 3 **SIZE:** M*

***Point Value:** 31* ***Availability:** 1 per basic squad*

***Structure:** 2–4 models per squad*

***Attacks:** The Venomlord primary attack is the vicious bite [**MPC:** 5, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Power:** POW + 1, **AM:** –2]; however, many also take the following attack option:*

***Venom Spit (+17 PV):** [**MPC:** 6, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 5/+1, **M** 10/—, **L** 20/–1, **Power:** 5, **AM:** –2].*

Storm Spiders (Individuals)

***MP:** 10 **CC:** 5 **RC:** 2 **POW:** 6 **BOD:** 6 **BRN:** 3 **GUT:** 7 **LIF:** 3 **AR:** 4 **SIZE:** L*

***Point Value:** 58* ***Availability:** 1 per squad*

***Structure:** Individual*

***Attacks:** Massive mandibles [**MPC:** 6, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Power:** POW +2, **AM:** –2, **Damage:** 2]*

Vehicle (Tow Beetle, Medium Walker Transport)

***MP:** 10 **CC:** 5 **TC:** 2 **POW:** 7 **BOD:** 7 **LIF:** 4 **AR:** 5(2)*

***Point Value:** 84* ***Availability:** 1 per squad*

***Type:** Medium Walker Transport (10)*

FORCE CREATION STRATEGIES

It is nearly impossible to be satisfied with your first results when creating a custom element of any game. There's always some strategy that you forgot to consider, or an issue of balance you didn't get quite right. The following suggestions should help you make a force you're fairly happy with on your first try.

The misconception that most people will initially stumble over is that bigger models are better. This simply isn't true. More often then not, larger models are overrun by smaller models—and if those smaller models all have ranged attacks, they quickly overcome any stat advantage the large model possesses. It doesn't matter how tough your large model is; when it's being pelted by two or three dozen ranged attacks each turn, eventually you're going to fail those Armor Tests and lose the model. In general, large models also have difficulty using cover, which can also put a force composed primarily of large models at a serious disadvantage against swarms of smaller models.

That being said, it's just a whole lot of fun to paint large models and to put them on the field of battle. If you give in to the temptation to create an all-big-guy custom force, just keep the rank-and-file units inexpensive so that you can field as many units as possible and reduce the numerical advantage that other types of forces will have against you.

It's a rare person who will be able to resist giving all the units in their first custom force powerful attacks and/or high-level stats. If you've never made your own miniatures army before, it's easy to go overboard. Once you get past this phase, however, you'll be able to see the advantages of including weak and/or cheap units with few or no options in your force. For example, you can keep the point cost low for certain units by focusing their abilities in either melee or ranged combat. By combining several units of each type in your force, you gain both tactical strength and flexibility. If you want to have one or two units that fight well in both types of combat, make such squads Elite, because a single Elite squad can use different attacks.

As you'll discover, your custom units will have higher Point Values than similar units in FASA's force lists. This is because we created our forces from a far more detailed set of parameters, which we simplified into these rules. We are already working on a more complete and complex set of rules that will allow you to create units closer in cost and abilities to the published units. The most significant change in these more indepth rules will be a list of special abilities for you to give your units. Until such a list is available, be inventive and create your own, using the abilities of the units in this book as a guideline. Brainstorming ability concepts with your gaming group can be very productive, and if everyone who plays is involved in the process, the abilities you create are likely to be more balanced.

PREPARING MINIATURES

Before you start playing *VOR* you'll need to know how to assemble the miniatures properly. Because of the tools needed to do this, younger gamers should have an adult present during this process. You will need a modeling knife, glue, a flat surface and a modeling mat or newspaper to work on.

ASSEMBLING AND PAINTING MODELS

A good hobby store can offer advice on preparing assembling, and painting models. Our general advice for assembling miniatures is to use either instant-bonding glue or five-minute glue. Instant-bonding glue sets quickly, but five-minute glue is more durable, especially for large models.

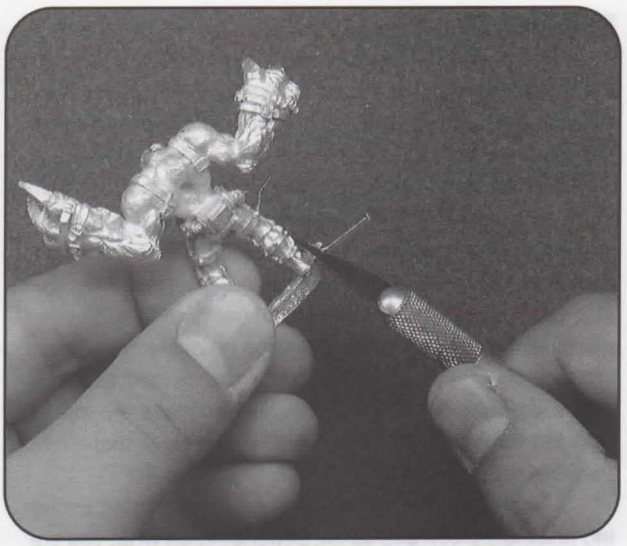
In general, don't worry about your artistic ability when painting models. If a model looks good from 3 feet away, you've done a good job of painting it. Consult the images on pp. 70–72 and the upcoming force books for color scheme ideas. Finally, keep in mind that you need not paint all of your models in one sitting. There is nothing wrong with using unpainted miniatures to play; paint a few at a time at your leisure.

CLEANING AND ASSEMBLY

The first step in preparing models is to clean off any excess "flash" or trimmings. Flash is excess gunk created during the molding process, and it's a good idea to remove it prior to gluing and painting the figure. A modeling knife (X-acto, for instance) is the best tool for doing this. Simply scrape off the flash with the blade until there are no prominent seams or edges.

Once you've cleaned the miniature of flash, you're ready to glue it together. With a multi-part miniature, it is important to go through a trial assembly without glue to make sure you understand how it all fits together. This helps to avoid mistakes during assembly. Super glue, Krazy glue or any standard modeling glue are all excellent for assembling small and medium models. Though normal Krazy glue can be used for large models, you may want to play it safe and use a two-part epoxy glue to get a stronger bond for the heavier pieces that come with these figures.

In addition, whenever you're dealing with a large model that has heavy secondary parts to affix, you may want to "pin" them in place to further strengthen their bond. Pinning is the act of using a small pin, slightly inset into both parts, to give the best possible support for larger pieces. This is fairly tedious, but well worth the effort. Use a small hand drill, available at most hobby stores, to do the drilling. Make a small hole in the piece you're going to attach to the model, and glue a piece of thick wire (about twice the depth of the drilled hole in length) into that part. Now apply a tiny amount of wet paint to the tip of the wire and place the pieces together in the proper position, marking the spot you need to drill to fit the exposed pin. Drill on the marked spot, then attach the part to the model using glue.



ATTACHING THE MINIATURE TO ITS BASE

Small and medium-sized models all have a tab on the bottom of the figure. This is designed to fit into the slot on the 1-inch (20mm) base. Larger models usually have pegs on the bottom that correspond to the holes in a 2-inch (40mm) base. In either case, the glue is applied to the tab or pegs, and then the model is inserted into the base. Once you have done this, you must hold the miniature steady for a few min-

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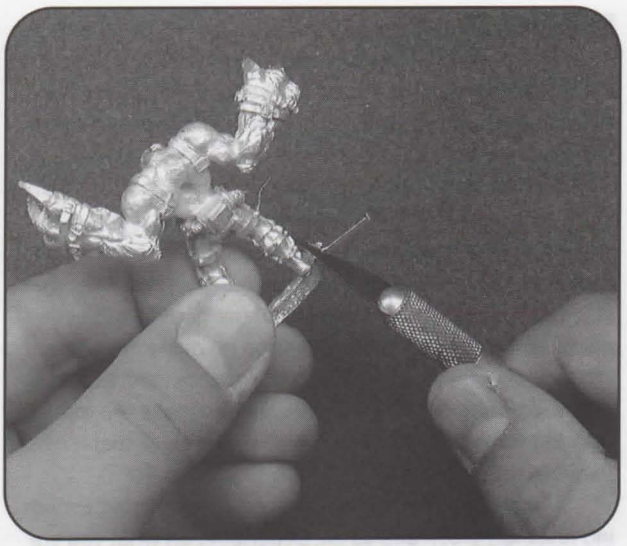

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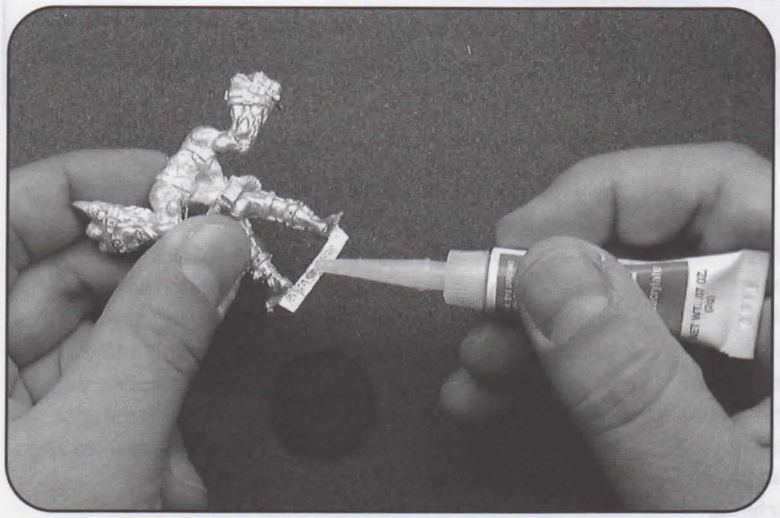
utes while the glue hardens. The temperature of the room can greatly effect the dry time for some glues, so be patient and don't move the miniature until the glue has completely hardened.

If you are planning to customize the miniature or its base in any way—by gluing on extra pieces, removing parts and so on—now is the time to do so. You should have the miniature as complete and ready-to-paint as possible at this point.



PRIMING THE MINIATURE

Now comes the fun part of this process, the painting. Before you start painting the figure you should prime it to give yourself a good surface to paint on. Paint doesn't stick to metal very well, so using a primer as a base coat helps.

The two most common colors to prime a miniature are black and white. Black will darken many of the paints that you use on the miniature and may require you to apply a second or third coat of a particular color to get the tint that you desire. Black also fills in many of the hard-to-get-at nooks and crannies that are common on many miniatures. White allows any paints you apply to the miniature to be their fullest and richest color, but can also make the model's coloring too bright and/or leave awkward areas that are hard to get at with a brush.

A number of colored primers are also available, including red, blue, green and so on. Depending on what you are painting and the primer's shade, you may find these extremely useful. The choice of primer is ultimately your choice, but we encourage you to experiment with several to see what works best for you. For beginners, black is probably the best choice.

APPLYING THE BASE COATS

Take a minute to study the miniature that you are about to paint. Try to get a good mental picture of what you want it to look like when you're done painting it. What colors do you want the flesh to be? How do you see the model's weapon being colored? Once you've done this, you are ready to continue. Paint all the main areas of the miniature the colors you want them to be. Don't worry about shading or highlights at this point, just focus on getting the basic shade of the color you want onto each area. If you accidentally get paint on an area you hadn't intended to, don't worry about it; just finish the region you're working on and then touch up the area you accidentally marked. When the entire miniature is covered in base colors, you are ready to proceed to the next stage, shading and highlights.

SHADING AND HIGHLIGHTS

Novice miniature painters may want to skip this step until they are a bit more familiar with the painting process. The extent to which you use shading and highlighting on a model depends on the time you have available and the importance of the piece within your army. For example, you probably don't need to labor over each grunt within your force; you would take forever to finish. Instead, you should keep the basic models in your force simple in their color schemes and level of detail. Large models and character models, on the other hand, are something you should take your time on, painting them as best you can. They are the miniatures that will most represent your force on the table, so you probably want them to look sharp.

Shading is a technique designed to deepen the colors you have already established with your base coating. The most common way of achieving this is to use an ink wash of a darker tint than the base color on the desired area. Ink washes are usually composed of 1 part paint and 3 parts water, so if you can't find an ink wash of a color that you need, you can mix up some on your own. Cover the entire area in the wash and let it seep into the recesses to get the effect you want. Instead of using ink washes, you can always paint a slightly darker color when applying the base coats for a model, then paint on progressively lighter shades, working into the highlights. This is good for people who don't like dealing with the messy ink washes but want to get similar effects on their miniatures.

Highlighting a miniature involves painting slightly lighter shades of color onto each of the areas of the miniature to add to the depth of a miniature's color scheme. This can often be achieved by using a dry brushing technique. Dry brushing involves getting a small amount of paint onto the brush, wiping the brush on a towel until there is almost no paint remaining, and then dragging the tip of the brush gently across the upraised areas of a given part of the model. This can give a soft and subtle look to the highlights if you're careful. We strongly urge you to practice on a spare miniature if you have one available.

In some cases you'll want to avoid dry brushing your highlights and simply paint them on instead. This is best for flat areas with little or no detail because dry brushing on these parts is next to impossible. Just remember when you are doing your shading and highlights that you don't want to have too extreme a difference between the base color, shaded color and highlight color of each region on the figure. A smooth, subtle transition is what you are shooting for.

DETAILING

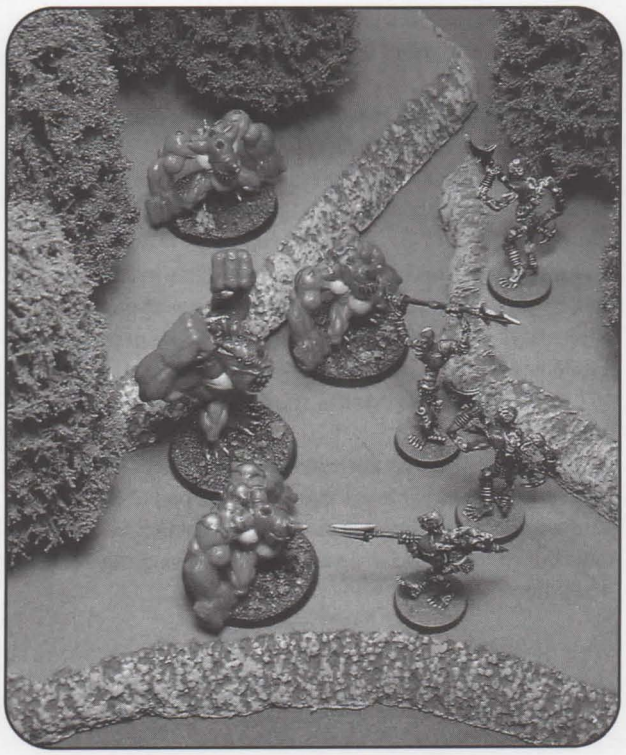
The last and most tedious step of painting a miniature is applying paint to the details such as eyes, gems, belt buckles, teeth and so on. This step is critical to pulling the whole miniature together in terms of the color scheme and over-all appearance. The eyes are one of the most important parts of a miniature to paint even though they make up a fairly small portion of the figure. We recommend that you first paint the entire eye black and then put a dot of white at each corner of the eye. This creates the illusion of a pupil in the eye, and, if done correctly, this technique can help you avoid having miniatures with crossed eyes.

PROTECTING YOUR MINIATURES WITH VARNISH

Once you've finished painting your miniature, you'll want to protect it with a sealant. Varnish spray comes in matte and gloss varieties. Matte varnish retains more of the original color of the miniature as it was painted. Gloss, though much more durable, has a tendency to alter the intensity of the paint it is applied to. The safest way to go when protecting your miniatures with varnish is to use multiple coats combining the two different types (i.e., matte, then gloss, then matte). This gives the best protection to the figure while causing the least distortion to the paint's appearance.

PAINTING AND BASING TERRAIN

All of the above mentioned techniques apply to painting terrain as well. The only real difference is that terrain pieces tend to be much larger than most miniatures, so unless you have a lot of time, you may want to keep the level of detail down to a minimum. Be sure to give your terrain pieces a few extra coats of sealant because they will be handled a lot over time. If you are dealing with cardboard or scratch-built terrain, it's a good idea to put the pieces on a larger base to make them more stable. This base can be made out of cardboard, plastic card or wood. Just cut the base a few inches larger all around than the actual terrain piece and glue the terrain down using the strongest glue you have available. Krazy glue is not really good for this because terrain has a tendency to flex while it's being used, and Krazy glue, being very brittle, will snap if flexed. Try to make the surface of the terrain's base match the gaming surface you play on.



FORCE LISTS

This section describes the core units of four of the most prominent forces in the Maelstrom: growlers, Union, Neo-Soviets and zykhee. Each force list provides the available composition of the force, the stats for each unit, the abilities of each unit and the general force abilities, as well as weapons and other equipment available for each force. These force lists will be expanded in the force books for each race and faction.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The following information describes the categories of information provided for each force and unit, including a key for the statistics and other specific points that are important to remember.

Weapons/Abilities: Unless otherwise noted, all weapons and abilities can be used an unlimited number of times in a turn. Unless otherwise noted, all weapons inflict 1 point of damage.

Point Value: The notation "+[a number] PV" indicates that a weapon or ability adds to the Point Value of a unit. For example, if a weapon has the notation "+5 PV," adding that weapon to a unit costs an additional 5 points when building a force for play.

UNIT DESCRIPTIONS

The following categories of information are used to describe each unit type. Not all units require an entry for all categories of information.

Statistics: See the explanation of model statistics on p. 74. Note that any armor listed under *Equipment* is factored into the unit's AR.

Point Value: The Point Value represents the cost of the unit, per model, when building a force.

Availability: Availability indicates the maximum number of units of that type that can be included when building a force.

Structure: This is the number of models in a squad unit. Some squads contain a specific number of models, others have a number range. In addition, some units require a unit leader.

Equipment: This lists the standard equipment each unit of this type carries.

Options: This lists alternate equipment a unit of this type may carry, either in addition to or instead of the standard equipment. If optional equipment costs additional PV, that cost will be noted in parentheses following the equipment.

Abilities: This section contains both standard and optional abilities for each unit. The description of each unit type specifies the standard abilities and the number of optional abilities allowed for that unit. The PV cost for optional abilities appears in parentheses following the name of the ability.

WEAPON/ABILITY STATISTICS

Move Point Cost (MPC): Move Points represent the cost of using the weapon or ability.

Uses/Turn: If a weapon or ability can only be used a limited number of times in a turn, that number will appear here.

Range: Range represents the distance at which a weapon or ability may affect its target. Each weapon or ability has a short (S), medium (M) and long (L) range. Each range also has a **Range Modifier,** a positive or negative number applied to the user's Ranged Combat before rolling D10 for the attack. The range and the range modifier are formatted as follows: **Range: S** 20/+2, **M** 30/+1, **L** 50/–1, with the range appearing to the left of the slash, and the range modifier appearing to the right of the slash. The number given for range is the maximum distance for that range, in inches (i.e., **S** 20 means the maximum short range is 20 inches).

Power: The Power of a weapon or ability is used in the same manner as a model's Power stat—to determine whether an attack inflicts damage on a target. If a model is attacking with no weapon, it uses its own Power in close (melee) combat. If a model is attacking with a weapon, the weapon's Power is used instead. If a melee weapon lists its Power in the form of a modifier, such as POW +1, this means the model's own Power is used, and a +1 modifier is added to it.

Armor Modifier (AM): Some weapons and abilities penetrate armor more easily than others. These have an armor modifier, a number that is subtracted from the target model's Armor Rating before the player makes an Armor Test when hit by that weapon or ability.

An AM of "no test" means that the target may not make an Armor Test against that attack.

Mode: Weapons and abilities that can be used indirectly (p. 85), in full-auto mode (p. 85) or that have an area of effect, using the splash template (p. 84) or the blast radius template (p. 84) are designated here. Ranged attacks that can be used point blank in melee combat (p. 84) are also indicated here.

Damage: If a weapon or ability causes more than 1 point of damage, the amount of damage it causes will be listed here.

GROWLER FORCE LIST

Growlers are huge, muscle-bound creatures. Their oversized arms, claws and horns make them brutally efficient hunters, and their main form of communication—a low-level, packmind telepathy—gives them a particularly effective group attack. Strong physiques and the ability to consume almost any substance as nourishment greatly enhances their survivability and allows them to reproduce prolifically. Their lack of technology and rudimentary intelligence appear to be only slight disadvantages.

A growler force may consist of members of a single pack or members from a number of different packs of the same breed, and may range in size from a small hunting pack of a dozen or so individuals to a large war pack numbering in the hundreds. Though multi-breed growler forces do exist, they generally disintegrate quickly due to infighting.

GENERAL RULES

All growlers have the following abilities:

Charging: In the turn that an attacking growler moves into base-to-base contact with a target for a close combat attack, add +2 to the growler's Close Combat rather than the usual +1.

Brute Force: Unless stated otherwise, all growler melee attacks have an armor modifier of –1; this is cumulative with other melee armor modifiers.

RAZORBACK GROWLERS

The most numerous and aggressive of all growler breeds, Razorback growlers are named for their metallic bone structure. This characteristic is most prominent in their back spikes, which have the appearance of sharpened solid steel. Most Razorbacks have predominantly red coloring with a wide variety of patterns and textures on their hides.

PUP

Even at a young age, the steel-like bones of the Razorbacks make the pups tougher and give them greater survivability.

MP: 12 **CC:** 3 **RC:** 2 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 3 **BRN:** 1 **GUT:** 4 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 1 **SIZE:** S

Point Value: 8

Structure: Up to 24, bought and played in squads of 4 to 6. You can buy an additional squad of pups for every momma in your force.

Abilities

Insecure: Growler pups are less gutsy than the older members of the pack, and so have a 2-inch squad coherency.

ONEHORN

In addition to being resilient, onehorns are both vicious and relentless. Even though they are not yet full-grown, growlers at this stage of growth pose a serious threat since they are especially proficient at using their horns in battle.

MP: 10 **CC:** 4 **RC:** 2 **POW:** 5 **BOD:** 5 **BRN:** 2 **GUT:** 5 **LIF:** 2 **AR:** 3 **SIZE:** L

Point Value: 29

Structure: Up to 12, bought and played in squads of 3. You can buy an additional squad of 3 onehorns for each pup squad in your force.

Abilities

Gore Attack: Onehorns specialize in delivering powerful charging hits with their prominent head horn. When a onehorn charges and moves at least 3 inches prior to striking his target, add +3 to the attacker's Close Combat (rather than the standard +2 for growlers) for the attack. If the attack strikes a small or medium model, roll D10. On a result of 7 or less, the model is knocked prone. Large models are knocked prone on a result of 5 or less.

Steel Horn (+5 PV): Some Razorback onehorns have a particularly tough bone structure which raises the gore attack to POW +1.

MOMMA

Razorback mommas stomp through their herds of pups like tempests. Because the females of the pack are constantly angry and hostile in defense of their pups, only the bravest bulls dare to approach these terrible beasts.

MP: 10 **CC:** 5 **RC:** 3 **POW:** 4 **BOD:** 5 **BRN:** 3 **GUT:** 7 **LIF:** 3 **AR:** 3 **SIZE:** L

Point Value: 40

Structure: Individual, limit of 3 per force. You can buy additional mommas at double their normal cost.

Abilities

Maternal Rage: Momma growlers will take revenge against any attackers that harm their pups. If a momma has LOS to a model when it kills a pup, add +2 to her Close Combat for all melee attacks she makes against that model and/or the squad the model belongs to for the rest of the game. Such melee attacks also cost only 1 MP (rather than the usual 4 MP).

Vicious Claws (+5 PV): Some momma growlers specialize in melee attacks using their vicious claws. [**MPC:** 3, **Power:** POW + 1, **AM:** –3]

BULL

Though bulls make up the bulk of most growler packs, they also have the highest death rate. These savage, vicious creatures live to fight and kill, and will attack anything that crosses their paths. Their high mortality rate is a result of nearly constant infighting.

MP: 10 **CC:** 5 **RC:** 3 **POW:** 6 **BOD:** 6 **BRN:** 2 **GUT:** 6 **LIF:** 3 **AR:** 5 **SIZE:** L

Point Value: 50

Structure: Individuals, limit 6 per force. You can buy an additional bull for every squad of onehorns in your force.

Abilities: In addition to the Intimidating Presence ability, Razorback bulls also can have up to two of the following abilities.

Intimidating Presence: When rolling for close combat attacks, any small- or medium-sized enemy model in base-to-base contact with a bull or chieftain makes a critical fumble on a result of 9 or 10.

Fearsome Roar (+2 PV): The growler can cut loose with a truly fearsome roar of deafening proportions. Choose a target model within 12 inches of the roaring growler to make a Guts Test. If the model fails the test, immediately move the model 2 inches directly away from the offending bull or chieftain (if the model is engaged in melee, it attempts to break free). In addition, the affected model must make a Guts Test in order to move closer to the growler on its next turn. [**MPC:** 2]

Shockwave (+10 PV): By slamming his massive fists into the earth, a growler with this ability can produce a shockwave effect that can damage and disrupt enemy models. Choose a target point on the board. The shockwave travels D10 + 6 inches toward the target point. Any model within 1 inch of an imaginary line drawn from the attacker to the target point takes a hit from a Power 3 attack and must make a Knockdown Test. [**MPC:** 4]

Rend 'n' Throw! (+10 PV): A growler bull with this ability can dig its paws into the ground and rip up a massive hunk of earth to hurl at an enemy model. Use the standard ranged combat rules, p. 80. [**MPC:** 6, **Power:** 6, **AM:** -1, **Range:** 16", **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 2"]

Mighty Leap (+8 PV): A growler with this ability may launch himself into the air by virtue of his extraordinary upper body strength and cover an impressive distance to close with his enemies. This is the last action a growler can take in a turn. Any MP remaining after the leap is lost while the growler reorients himself.

To use this ability, first choose a direction for the leap. The growler leaps a distance of D10 + 5 inches in that direction. If the leaping growler lands on another model, the victim may attempt to dodge (see p. 87). If the Dodge Test fails, the model is automatically knocked prone and takes a hit of [**Power:** 6, **AM:** –1]. If the victim survives the hit, place him against the base of the leaping growler in any facing. [**MPC:** 5]

Frenzy (+10 PV): Razorbacks with the frenzy ability can go berserk during battle. The growler may use this ability only once per game, and the player must announce the use of frenzy when the model is activated. All melee attacks made by the growler during the turn it is frenzied cost only 2 MP.

CHIEFTAIN

Extremely violent and aggressive creatures, chieftains have slashed and chomped their way to the top of Razorback society. They possess an edge over their pack in cunning learned from years of battle experience, making them truly dangerous adversaries.

MP: 10 **CC:** 6 **RC:** 3 **POW:** 7 **BOD:** 7 **BRN:** 3 **GUT:** 7 **LIF:** 4 **AR:** 7 **SIZE:** L

Point Value: 83

Structure: 1 per force.

Abilities: In addition to the Intimidating Presence (see above) and Super Tough Frame abilities, growler chieftains may also have up to three of the bull abilities.

Super Tough Frame (+15 PV): Certain Razorback chieftains have such tough skeletons that they are incredibly resistant to injury. Growlers with this ability always get an Armor Test (even against critical hits). Attacks with an armor modifier greater than –2 and attacks that don't normally allow Armor Tests are treated as having an AM of only –2.

UNION FORCE LIST

Union soldiers are fierce, determined and intelligent warriors who rely heavily on their advanced military technologies and training to wage war. The bulk of the Union military consists of infantry of varying levels of experience, supported by a wide variety of offensive and defensive armor. The Union's policy of "leave no man behind" has allowed them to maintain a high level of expertise in their ranks, which continues to give them an edge in combat.

COMMANDERS

Commanders have survived many battles relatively intact. Most commanders are war heroes that just can't bear to sit back when there's fighting to be done. Their appearance on the battlefield always gives the troops a significant morale boost.

MP: 10 **CC:** 6 **RC:** 6 **POW:** 4 **BOD:** 5 **BRN:** 6 **GUT:** 7 **LIF:** 2 **AR:** 3 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: 50

Availability: 1 per force.

Equipment: Kevlon armor, Pitbull rifle, Pug pistol

Options: Frag grenades (+5 PV), replace Kevlon armor with power armor (+15 PV), replace Pitbull rifle or Pug pistol with a trench knife, vibro knife or Punisher at no additional cost.

Abilities

Commanding Presence: The powerful presence of the commander instills courage in his force. Any Union models within 12 inches and LOS (facing does not matter) of the commander may re-roll any failed Guts Tests; the second result must be used.

Superior Tactics (+15 PV): This ability adds +1 to all Union Initiative rolls during the game. If a commander with this ability dies, modify all Union Initiative rolls by –1 for the remainder of the game.

INFANTRY SQUADS

The heart and soul of the Union forces is the infantryman, a rock-solid soldier in both mind and body. Because the Union force maintains extremely low fatality rates (even in defeats), their infantry squads possess valuable combat experience that gives them an advantage over most of their opponents.

You must purchase a sergeant for each squad in your force.

SERGEANTS

Union sergeants are tough as nails and mean as sin. Sergeants push their men to "be all that they can be" and are a valuable asset on the battlefield.

MP: 10 **CC:** 5 **RC:** 6 **POW:** 4 **BOD:** 5 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 7 **LIF:** 2 **AR:** 3 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: 38

Availability: Must take 1 per infantry squad in force

Structure: Sergeants must be part of a squad and must adhere to squad coherency.

Equipment: Kevlon armor, Pitbull rifle, Pug pistol

Options: Frag grenades (+5 PV), replace Kevlon armor with power armor (+15 PV), replace Pitbull rifle or Pug pistol with a trench knife, vibro knife or Punisher at no additional cost.

Abilities: In addition to the Leader and Splitting Squads abilities, sergeants may have up to two of the following abilities.

Leader: For any squad with a sergeant present, use the sergeant's Guts statistic for Morale and Guts Tests made by any member of the squad.

Splitting Squads: A Union squad may be split into two squads as long as the sergeant is alive. To split a squad, announce that you are splitting the squad when you activate them. Note that models in each half of the squad must be in coherency with the other squad models in their half. To rejoin the two halves of the squad, simply announce before activating the squad that they will be reuniting, then move all members of the squad into coherency.

None of the models within a squad may make ranged attacks during a turn in which they split.

A split squad may reunite even if their sergeant is killed.

"Move it! Move it! Move it!" (+10 PV): In any turn in which a sergeant with this ability is alive and the squad only moves (the squad may not attack, hold their action and so on), add +3 to the squad's MP.

A squad may split during such a turn.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" (+8 PV): In any turn in which a sergeant with this ability is alive and the squad only makes ranged attacks (the squad may not move, hold their actions and so on), the squad may attack any targets within LOS and range (regardless of which target is closest). All shots made this turn are at –1 MP and –1 RC.

"I ain't got time to die!" (+15 PV): Each time a sergeant with this ability loses his last point of Lifeforce, roll D10. On a result of 5 or less, treat the sergeant as if he still possessed 1 point of Lifeforce. A sergeant who survives by use of this ability is considered a casualty for purposes of calculating Glory Points at the end of the battle.

STANDARD INFANTRY SQUAD

Standard Union infantry represent new recruits and soldiers in their first year of military duty. These men receive the best tactical and strategic training available and they have the success rate to prove it.

MP: 10 **CC:** 4 **RC:** 5 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 6 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 3 **SIZE:** M
Point Value: 20
Availability: Unlimited
Structure: 8 + 1 sergeant
Equipment: Kevlon armor, Pitbull rifle, Pug pistol
Options: 1 model can replace his Pitbull with a Rottweiler machine gun (+22 PV); 1 model may replace his Pitbull with a Bulldog support rifle (+6 PV). The entire squad may be equipped with frag grenades (+5 PV per model).

ELITE INFANTRY SQUAD

Elite Union soldiers have two or more years of battlefield experience and carry a more diverse mix of weapons.

MP: 10 **CC:** 5 **RC:** 6 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 6 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 3 **SIZE:** M
Point Value: 25
Availability: 1 squad per standard squad
Structure: 6–8 + 1 sergeant
Equipment: Kevlon armor, Pitbull rifle, Pug pistol
Options: Up to half (round down) of the models may replace their Pitbull rifles with Bulldog rifles (+6 PV per model). 1 model may replace his Pitbull rifle with a Rottweiler machine gun (+22 PV). The entire squad may be equipped with frag grenades (+5 PV per model).

BRAWLER ASSAULT SQUAD

Brawlers are rugged soldiers trained to deal with the enemy up close and personal. These men have expertise in a wide range of melee fighting techniques and weapons.

MP: 10 **CC:** 5 **RC:** 4 **POW:** 4 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 6 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 3 **SIZE:** M
Point Value: 22
Availability: 1 squad per standard squad
Structure: 6–8 + 1 sergeant
Equipment: Kevlon armor, trench knives, Pug pistol
Options: Any model may replace its trench knife with a vibro knife (+3 PV per model) or Punisher (+2 PV per model). The entire squad may be equipped with frag grenades (+5 PV per model).

UNION ARSENAL

This section describes equipment carried by Union forces or offered as optional gear.

ARMOR

Kevlon Armor

Major breakthroughs in impact-resistant materials produced an extremely thin but strong substance called Kevlon. This material can be woven into combat fatigues and flak vests, giving the common soldier excellent protection from small arms fire. [**AR:** 3]

Power Armor

These sophisticated suits provide excellent protection for troops in battle as well as increased melee-combat effectiveness. Modify unarmed melee attacks made by models wearing Union power armor by AM –1 to reflect the increased strength the suit gives the wearer. [**AR:** 5]

MELEE WEAPONS

Trench Knife

A larger version of the classic trench weapon of World War I, the trench knife is a long blade combined with a set of brass knuckles—a fierce weapon in close quarters. The first attack made with this weapon when the model has charged its target is at POW +2, AM –2 (rather than the usual +1/–1). [**MPC:** 3, **Power:** POW +1, **AM:** –1].

Vibro Knife

The vibro knife is an extremely durable 10-inch blade that vibrates until it becomes white-hot. This weapon is difficult to wield safely; modify attacks made with the vibro knife by –1 CC. [**MPC:** 3, **Power:** POW +2, **AM:** –3]

Punisher

The Punisher is a truncheon made from a surprisingly strong light steel alloy. Small and medium models must make a Knockdown Test each time they are struck by the Punisher. [**MPC:** 4, **Power:** POW +2, **AM:** 0]

RANGED WEAPONS

Frag Grenade

A lightweight explosive designed to be thrown by hand. Frag grenades are most commonly used to clear the enemy out of bunkers, trenches or small rooms. [**MPC:** 5, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 5/+1, **M** 10/—, **L** —/—, **Power:** 4, **AM:** 0, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 3"]

Pug Pistol

The Pug pistol is the standard-issue handgun of the Union military, favored for its ease of cleaning and repair in the field. [**MPC:** 2, **Uses/Turn:** 2, **Range: S** 6/+2, **M** 12/—, **L** —/—, **Power:** 3, **AM:** –1, **Mode:** point-blank]

Pitbull Assault Rifle

The Pitbull is the standard-issue Union rifle. Small, powerful and accurate, the Pitbull possesses all the qualities a soldier wants in a gun. [**MPC:** 3, **Uses/Turn:** 2, **Range: S** 10/+1, **M** 20/—, **L** 30/–1, **Power:** 4, **AM:** –1]

HEAVY RANGED WEAPONS

Bulldog Support Rifle

The Bulldog support rifle can fire as a standard Pitbull rifle (use Pitbull stats), or as a grenade launcher (use the following stats). [**MPC:** 8, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 10/+2, **M** 15/+1, **L** 20/–1, **Power:** 7, **AM:** –2, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 2"]

Rottweiler Machine Gun

This heavy-duty, high-powered machine gun was originally designed to be fitted to vehicles. Its bulk makes it difficult for a soldier to wield as an infantry weapon, but its superior range and power make up for any other shortcomings. [**MPC:** 6, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 20/+2, **M** 30/+1, **L** 50/–1, **Power:** 7, **AM:** –3, **Mode:** full-auto]

ZYKHEE FORCE LIST

The zykhee are the last vestiges of a once-scientifically advanced race of humanoids that nearly destroyed themselves through abuse of technology. Now a spiritually enlightened and highly disciplined warrior race, these tall, slender beings use their advanced understanding of both science and the mystic arts to defend what remains of their people rather than to enslave others.

GENERAL RULES

All zykhee have the following ability:

Darkness: Darkness is a zykhee's natural environment, and so they suffer no penalties given by a scenario for darkness in combat.

SCOUT SQUAD

The youngest of the battle-worthy zykhee, the scouts represent the warriors of the future. Trained to observe the enemy and harass opposing forces with low-level attacks, the scouts are responsible for delaying the enemy until the more experienced warriors arrive.

MP: 12 **CC:** 4 **RC:** 4 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 3 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 5 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 0 **SIZE:** M
Point Value: 15
Availability: 1 squad per warrior squad in your force
Structure: 3–6
Equipment: Slingstaff kala blade
Options: Kala blade (+7 PV)
Abilities

Advanced Deployment: Zykhee scouts scan potential battlefields in advance of a zykhee force. To represent this, scout squads deploy last (after all players have placed their models) and may be deployed anywhere on the battlefield. They must be deployed at least 10 inches away from enemy models.

ZYKHEE WARRIORS

Upon reaching adulthood, a zykhee's path is chosen for him. The majority become warriors for the defense of their people. There are three primary schools of warrior training: Ra'gha, Kach'ar and Divakk. Each discipline focuses on using different types of weapons and gear, but all warrior disciplines use the mighty Vikoon staff. Made of enchanted metal alloys and forged in mystic fire, this sacred instrument of war is given to each zykhee as he emerges as a warrior. For most zykhee, the staff they receive at Emergence is the staff they use until they die.

As they increase in power and experience, zykhee warriors also receive mystic tattoos that grant them unique and terrifying abilities.

RA'GHA WARRIOR SQUAD

Warriors of this discipline focus on the raw potential of the self, increasing the effectiveness of the physical body and the body's expertise with the deadly Vikoon staff. Founded by the legendary warrior Ra'gha, who continues to train zykhee, the discipline of Ra'gha demands that its followers shun ranged weapons and engage the enemy in melee combat whenever possible.

MP: 12 **CC:** 6 **RC:** 4 **POW:** 4 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 4 **GUT:** 6 **LIF:** 2 **AR:** 2 **SIZE:** M
Point Value: 30
Availability: Unlimited
Structure: 3–6
Equipment: Each Ra'gha warrior is equipped with a Vikoon staff and warrior armor, and may choose only close combat tips for their Vikoon staffs.
Options: Each warrior may have 1 mystic tattoo (see *Mystic Tattoos*, p. 130) and a kala blade (+7 PV per model).

DIVAKK WARRIOR SQUAD

Divakk warriors are trained in ranged combat in order to support front-line zykhee troops. Founded by a zykhee warrior named Divakk-Ka, the Divakk discipline was the first warrior discipline to focus exclusively on ranged fighting techniques. The

development of the Divakk discipline created a place for ranged weaponry to be a warrior's weapon of choice, rather than a support weapon.

MP: 12 **CC:** 4 **RC:** 6 **POW:** 4 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 5 **LIF:** 2 **AR:** 2 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: 30

Availability: Unlimited

Structure: 3–6

Equipment: Each Divakk warrior is equipped with a Vikoon staff and warrior armor, and may choose up to 2 ranged combat tips for their Vikoon staffs.

Options: Any of the warriors can upgrade to heavy warrior armor (+10 PV per model). Each warrior may have 1 mystic tattoo (see *Mystic Tattoos*, p. 130) and a kala blade (+7 PV per model).

KA'CHAR WARRIOR SQUAD

Always striving to strike a perfect balance in their lives, Ka'char warriors seek to become a neutral element in the cosmic scheme. These intelligent and dangerous warriors use both ranged and close combat attacks in battle. The discipline is named for the devastating storm that has ravaged the zykhee homeworld for millennia.

MP: 12 **CC:** 5 **RC:** 5 **POW:** 4 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 5 **LIF:** 2 **AR:** 2 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: 30

Availability: Unlimited

Structure: 3–6

Equipment: Each warrior is equipped with a Vikoon staff and warrior armor, and may choose 1 ranged combat tip and 1 melee tip for their Vikoon staffs.

Options: Each warrior may have 1 mystic tattoo (see *Mystic Tattoos*, p. 130) and a kala blade (+7 PV per model).

MYSTICS

Caretakers of the Soul-Flame, the mystics are the ruling force of zykhee culture. Separate and mysterious, the mystics wield extraordinary powers derived from the mind and the flame. The mystics have become darker and more forbidding since the zykhee world was drawn into the Maelstrom.

First Circle

MP: 12 **CC:** 4 **RC:** 5 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 6 **GUT:** 6 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 2 **SIZE:** M

Second Circle

MP: 12 **CC:** 4 **RC:** 5 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 7 **GUT:** 7 **LIF:** 2 **AR:** 2 **SIZE:** M

Third Circle

MP: 12 **CC:** 5 **RC:** 5 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 8 **GUT:** 8 **LIF:** 3 **AR:** 2 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: Circle 1, 35; Circle 2, 50; Circle 3, 75

Availability: 1 per 2 squads in force, maximum 3

Structure: Individual

Equipment: Mystic staff, warrior armor

Options: Kala blade (+7 PV)

Abilities: All zykhee mystics possess the Aura of Darkness ability. A mystic may have a number of additional mystic abilities equal to its circle number.

Mystics must make a successful Brains Test when they use a mystic ability (except Aura of Darkness, which is always on) in order for the ability to manifest. A failed Brains Test means that the MP used for the ability is no longer available for that turn and the ability has no effect. A failed attempt at using a mystic ability also counts toward the uses per turn of that ability.

Aura of Darkness: An aura of darkness surrounds the bodies of all zykhee mystics. Enemies fighting the mystics modify their Close Combat and Ranged Combat by –1 to account for the effects of the aura. Zykhee are immune to this effect.

Bael Fire Blast (+10 PV): A flood of blue-green Bael Fire erupts from the mystic's hands and scorches those in front of the mystic with its chilling touch. The supernatural flames pass through terrain as if it weren't there, neither affecting nor being affected by terrain. Cover does not modify the attack, and targets receive no Armor Test when hit by a Bael Fire blast. [**MPC:** 4, **Power:** 4, **Uses/Turn:** 2, **AM:** No Test, **Mode:** splash template]

Wall of Souls (+7 PV): The mystic channels the eternal power of long-dead zykhee souls into an ethereal barrier 3 inches wide and 3 inches high. This barrier obscures attackers' vision; modify the Ranged Combat of any model trying to fire through the barrier by –2. The barrier is also unnerving to approach. An enemy model must make a successful Guts Test in order to walk through the Wall of Souls. A failed check means the model stops moving at the barrier and loses all remaining MP for that turn.

The Wall of Souls stays in effect until the mystic is next activated, when the player may choose to let the barrier dissipate or spend another 5 MP and make a Brains Test to keep it active. A failed attempt to keep the Wall of Souls active counts as the single use of this ability available per turn. [**MPC:** 5, **Uses/Turn:** 1]

Bael Fire Orbs (+6 PV): A mystic can create orbs of Bael Fire energies to float around the zykhee in a protective pattern; each orb is created separately. Whenever the controlling mystic is hit by ranged weapons, roll D10. On a result of 4 or less, the mystic may sacrifice an orb to deflect the attack (before making an Armor Test). The orbs last until the beginning of the mystic's next activation. [**MPC:** 3 per orb, **Uses/Turn:** 3]

Soul Forge (+9 PV): The very fabric of reality around the mystic tears open, filling with the essence of the mind and body-scorching Bael Fire. Center the blast-radius template on the mystic; all models touched by the 2-inch template (including the mystic himself) must make a successful Guts Test or be destroyed. Victims do not get Armor Tests against this attack. Modify the Guts statistic of enemy models by –1 for this check. Soul forge may be used a number of times per battle equal to the circle number of the mystic using it. [**MPC:** 5, **AM:** No Test, **Mode:** blast radius 2"]

Void Walk (+12 PV): A mystic can teleport from one part of the battlefield to another by amplifying and attuning his aura of darkness so that he is absorbed by it. To an onlooker, it appears as though the mystic were swallowed by shadows. When he reappears, a shadow forms from nothingness and he slowly fades back into being at his new location.

To use Void Walk, make a successful Brains Test and remove the mystic from the board. When you activate that mystic during the next turn, make another Brains Test. If the second Brains Test is successful, place the model anywhere on the playing area. The mystic may now take whatever actions he chooses up to his full MP. If the second Brains Test is a failure, the mystic is lost and gone forever. [**MPC:** 10]

ZYKHEE ARSENAL

The following section contains the statistics for zykhee armor, mystic tattoos and weapons. Depending on the tips chosen, staffs may have multiple attack capabilities.

ARMOR

Warrior Armor

Zykhee warrior armor is elaborate and decorated with mystic symbols. [**AR:** 2]

Heavy Warrior Armor

An sturdier and denser version of standard zykhee armor. [**AR:** 3]

WEAPONS

Kala Blade

Kala blades are thin plates of metal worn around the neck. Zykhee can quickly remove them, and with a snap of the wrist lock its segments together into a deadly ranged throwing weapon. The circuits built within and the design of the kala blade cause it to return to the thrower like a boomerang. On a critical hit (p. 80), the kala becomes lodged in the target and may not be used by that model for the rest of the game. [**MPC:** 4, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 8/—, **M** 16/+1, **L** —/—, **Power:** 4, **AM:** –3]

Slingstaff

Used primarily by zykhee scouts, the slingstaff is a short, sturdy metal staff with a durable sling at one end and a sharp bladed point on the other. The sling is used to throw small, bladed metal spheres.

Sling: [**MPC:** 3, **Uses/Turn:** 3, **Range: S** 3/+2, **M** 6/+1, **L** 12/—, **Power:** POW, **AM:** 0]

Blade: [**MPC:** 4, **Power:** POW, **AM:** –1]

Vikoon Staff

The Vikoon staff is the traditional zykhee weapon, given to members of the race when they reach maturity. The weapon is a complex device that appears to be nothing more than a large, well-crafted metal staff. The staff's function can be modified by using various battle tips, one at each end of the staff. Every Vikoon staff comes equipped with standard close combat tips, and each type of warrior can use certain alternate tips, as described in the force list. At the beginning of a battle, the warrior must designate which two tips he is using for that battle.

Mystic Staff

The mystics carry a more ornate version of the Vikoon staff. This version of the staff comes equipped with two standard close combat blades that cannot be swapped out.

CLOSE COMBAT TIPS

Standard Blade

Every Vikoon staff comes equipped with two standard blades, available in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. [**MPC:** 3, **Power:** POW, **AM:** –1]

Heavy Blade (+5 PV)

Larger and sturdier than the standard blade, the heavy blade slows the attack slightly, but hits with greater power. [**MPC:** 4, **Power:** POW + 1, **AM:** –1]

Blast (+10 PV)

One edge of the blast blade is designed to deliver an explosive energy blast upon impact, increasing the possibility that the attack will punch through the target's armor. On a successful hit, the target must make succeed at two Armor Tests or be damaged. [**MPC:** 4, **Power:** POW, **AM:** –1]

Electro (+7 PV)

The electro blade is laced with microscopic circuitry that delivers lethal amounts of electricity to a target upon impact. The next time the target model is activated, the player makes a Body Test. If the check fails, the model gets only half its MP that turn (round down). [**MPC:** 4, **Power:** POW, **AM:** –1]

Wrecker (+10 PV)

This large, wickedly-shaped tip has multiple cutting blades and stabbing points, making it unwieldy but brutally effective against lightly armored foes. Modify the Close Combat of the attacker by –1 when using this blade. [**MPC:** 4, **Power:** POW + 1, **AM:** –1, **Damage:** 2]

Piercing (+5 PV)

The piercing blade is specially barbed and has a sharp thrusting point, designed to penetrate heavily-armored targets. [**MPC:** 4, **Power:** POW, **AM:** –2]

RANGED COMBAT TIPS

All ranged combat tips may also be used as blunt objects for melee attacks, using the following stats. [**MPC:** 3, **Power:** POW, **AM:** 0]

Stinger (+2 PV)

This tip unleashes bursts of low-energy laser fire, used mostly to harass an enemy. [**MPC:** 3, **Range: S** 5/+1, **M** 10/— **L** 20/–1, **Power:** 3, **AM:** 0]

Laser (+6 PV)

The laser tip uses a reliable, medium-grade laser. [**MPC:** 4, **Range: S** 10/+1, **M** 20/— **L** 30/–1, **Power:** 4, **AM:** 0]

Plasma (+10 PV)

The plasma tip fires high-powered blasts of superheated plasma. [**MPC:** 7, **Range: S** 12/–1, **M** 24/+1 **L** 36/—, **Power:** 6, **AM:** –2, **Mode:** blast radius 1", **Damage:** 2]

Pod (+15 PV)

The pod tip is roughly equivalent to human grenade launchers, designed to fire two kinds of pods: explosive pods, that create a single large blast on impact, and scatter pods that spread numerous bomblets over the target area.

Scatter: [**MPC:** 8, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 15/—, **M** 30/+2 **L** 45/+1, **Power:** 4, **AM:** 0, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 1"]

Explosive: [**MPC:** 8, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 15/—, **M** 30/+2 **L** 45/+1, **Power:** 6, **AM:** –2, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 1"]

Lightning (+8 PV)

The lightning blade discharges a lightning-bolt-like blast that is extremely effective against large or heavily armored opponents. Add +3 to Ranged Combat against targets with an Armor Rating of 4 or more. gets do not get Armor Tests against this attack. [**MPC:** 5, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 5/—, **M** 10/—, **L** 15/—, **Power:** 5, **AM:** No Test]

MYSTIC TATTOOS

Tattoos are an important aspect of zykhee culture. Zykhee warriors use powerful mystic tattoos in battle for a variety of effects.

Hypnosis (+10 PV)

The hypnosis tattoo may be used once per game against an enemy model within 12 inches and LOS of the attacker. The target model must make a successful Brains Test or be hypnotized. A hypnotized model can do nothing but drool, and is considered prone for purposes of melee combat. The hypnotized model may pay 4 MP to make an additional Brains Test during its activations, and may make a Brains Test for 0 MP when hit by an attack. For each Brains Test the hypnotized model makes after the first, add +1 to the Brains statistic for the test. [**MPC:** 4]

Blur (+7 PV)

The wearer of this tattoo appears hazy to enemies. Modify all ranged combat attacks against this model by –1 RC. At the end of each turn in which wearer was attacked in ranged combat, roll D10. On a result of 5 or less, the tattoo has no effect for the remainder of the battle.

Illusion (+5 PV)

Once per battle, when a model with an illusion tattoo is hit by a close or ranged combat attack, the player immediately announces (before making an Armor Test) that the model is using the illusion tattoo and treats the attack as a miss. This tattoo cannot be used to avoid attacks from weapons that use templates to resolve their effects.

Vertigo (+10 PV)

The vertigo tattoo may be used once per game against an enemy model within 12 inches and LOS of the attacker. The targeted model must make a successful Brains Test or be affected by vertigo until the end of its next activation. If the affected model moves in its next activation, all it can do is stagger around in a random direction and distance (use the *Scatter* rules, p. 84), and can make no attack or other action. It cannot climb ladders or stairs (between levels of buildings or to get into a vehicle, for example) and will stop moving if it comes into contact with a barrier or obstacle. If the affected model chooses to attack rather than move, or if it is attacked in close combat, modify the affected model's Close Combat and Ranged Combat by –1, and the model cannot parry. [**MPC:** 5]

Speed (+7 PV)

A model can use the speed tattoo once per battle. Announce that the model is using this tattoo when the model is activated. The model may move 5 inches for 0 MP at any point during its turn.

NEO-SOVIET FORCE LIST

Rising like a phoenix from the ashes of former Russia, the Neo-Soviets represent everything that their cold-war ancestor believed and much, much more. Though the nation struggles to feed and clothe its people, it has once again established itself as a military juggernaut. The Neo-Soviets use ruthless biochemical weaponry and cruel genetic creations to offset their tactical and technological military shortcomings.

KOMMANDER

These ruthless, battle-seasoned veterans lead the Neo-Soviet forces. Kommanders are selected from the ranks of Neo-Soviet officers who have proven their worth in countless battles.

MP: 10 **CC:** 6 **RC:** 6 **POW:** 5 **BOD:** 5 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 8 **LIF:** 2 **AR:** 4 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: 50

Availability: 1 per force

Structure: Individual

Equipment: Viper sidearm, heavy Kevlon armor

Options: Kalashnikov assault rifle (+10 PV), rad grenades (+4 PV), power armor (+15 PV); replace Viper pistol with 1 of the following: bayonet (0 PV), rad baton (+5 PV), hammer and sickle (+6 PV).

Abilities

Commanding Presence: The Kommander's powerful presence instills courage in his force. Any Neo-Soviet models within 12 inches and LOS (facing does not matter) of the commander may re-roll any failed Guts Tests; the second result must be used.

Killer Reputation (+15 PV): A steely-eyed glare from a Kommander with Killer Reputation instills fear in the most battle-hardened adversaries. Modify by –1 the Ranged Combat or Close Combat (whichever is appropriate) of any model attacking a Kommander possessing this ability.

OFFICER

Neo-Soviet officers are extremely violent and capable warriors who push their soldiers to their absolute limits. Officers frequently execute a soldier as an example to the rest of the squad.

MP: 10 **CC:** 6 **RC:** 6 **POW:** 4 **BOD:** 5 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 7 **LIF:** 2 **AR:** 3 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: 40

Availability: 1 per 2 squads in your force

Structure: Individual

Equipment: Viper sidearm, Kevlon armor

Options: Rad grenades (+4 PV) and/or power armor (+15 PV), plus 1 of the following: bayonet (+2 PV), rad baton (+5 PV) or hammer and sickle (+6 PV).

Abilities: The following ability only affects vanguard and rad squads.

Execution: Neo-Soviet officers use fear and intimidation to motivate their troops. Once per turn, each officer can execute a member of a squad (within 6 inches of the officer) to give that squad a bonus. The officer can only execute a model during the time the officer is activated. The effect of the execution lasts until the end of the current turn.

To execute a model, announce the effect that will apply to the squad, then remove the executed model from the playing area as a casualty with no need to roll dice for success. The executed model counts for the opponent's Glory Point total. Executing a model gives the squad one of the following effects:

- All shots that can be aimed by the squad this turn are aimed without requiring an MP expenditure (see *Aimed Shots,* p. 80).
- Add +1 to Close Combat or Power for all melee attacks by the squad.
- Models in this squad may move an additional 3 inches for 0 MP at any point during its activation.
- The squad automatically succeeds in any Guts Tests this turn.

VANGUARD SQUAD

The vanguard squad represents the Neo-Soviets' most dependable and reliable ground troops. Even these troops, however, have high casualty rates, poor health and a general lack of support and supplies.

MP: 10 **CC:** 4 **RC:** 5 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 5 **GUT:** 5 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 3 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: 20

Availability: 1 squad per rad squad in your force

Structure: 6–8

Equipment: Kalashnikov rifle, Kevlon armor

Options: Rad grenades (+4 PV per model), bayonets (+1 PV per model), plus 1 model in the squad may be equipped with a heavy machine gun (+25 PV).

RAD SQUAD

Because they cannot properly maintain their vanguard infantry, the Neo-Soviets are forced to rely on the sickly, irradiated civilians of their radiation-soaked homeland as their front-line troops. These squads carry outdated weapons and are considered quite expendable.

MP: 10 **CC:** 3 **RC:** 4 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 3 **GUT:** 4 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 0 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: 10

Availability: Unlimited

Structure: 5–10

Equipment: SMG or assault rifle

Options: Rad grenades (+4 PV per model) or bayonets (+1 PV per model).

CHEMGRUNTS

Chemgrunts carry the feared chem sprayer, a weapon that shoots streams of deadly toxic substances. The exact composition of the toxic soup varies widely because the Neo-Soviet scientists continually attempt to concoct more powerful mixtures.

MP: 10 **CC:** 3 **RC:** 4 **POW:** 3 **BOD:** 4 **BRN:** 3 **GUT:** 5 **LIF:** 1 **AR:** 1 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: 20

Availability: 1 squad per rad squad in your force

Structure: 2–3

Equipment: Chem sprayer

CYCLOPS

The cyclops mutant is one of the first successful Neo-Soviet attempts to genetically design a powerful and independent bio-creature for the battlefield. Neo-Soviet troops are still disturbed by the sight of these towering monstrosities marching beside them in battle, even though they've been in use for more than five years.

MP: 8 **CC:** 5 **RC:** 4 **POW:** 5 **BOD:** 5 **BRN:** 2 **GUT:** 6 **LIF:** 2 **AR:** 2 **SIZE:** M

Point Value: 35

Availability: 1–3 per officer in your force

Structure: 1 (individual), 2–3 (1 squad), 4–6 (2 squads, divided as evenly as possible), 7–9 (3 squads, divided as evenly as possible), and so on.

Abilities

Huge Claws: The savage steel claws of the cyclops are extremely deadly and are capable of ripping through most types of conventional armor. [**MPC:** 3, **Power:** 6, **AM:** –2]

Eye Beam: The cyclops can fire an intense beam of hard radiation from its eye. [**MPC:** 6, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 5/+3, **M** 10/+2, **L** 20/+1, **Power:** 6, **AM:** –4]

NEO-SOVIET ARSENAL

ARMOR

Kevlon Armor

Major breakthroughs in impact-resistant materials produced an extremely thin but strong substance called Kevlon. This material can be woven into combat fatigues and flak vests, giving the common soldier excellent protection from small arms fire. [**AR:** 3]

Heavy Kevlon Armor

An improved, sturdier version of Kevlon armor. [**AR:** 4]

Power Armor

These sophisticated suits provide excellent protection for troops in battle as well as increased melee-combat effectiveness. Modify unarmed melee attacks made by models wearing Neo-Soviet power armor by AM –1 to reflect the increased strength the suit gives the wearer. [**AR:** 5]

MELEE WEAPONS

Bayonet Blade

A hefty blade that can be attached to the end of a rifle or wielded by hand. The first attack with this weapon when the model has charged is at POW +2, AM –2 (as opposed to the usual +1/–1 for charging). [**MPC:** 3, **Power:** POW +1, **AM:** –1]

Rad Baton

The rad baton glows a vibrant green given its saturation by concentrated amounts of radiation. Soldiers carry the rad baton in a lead sheath to minimize their exposure to the radiation. Targets do not get an Armor Test against this attack. This weapon is difficult to wield safely, and so modify attacks made with the rad baton by –1 CC. [**MPC:** 4, **Power:** POW, **AM:** No Test]

Hammer and Sickle

These tandem weapons symbolize the Neo-Soviet nation. A model armed with this weapon package may not use any other weapons during a turn in which it uses the hammer and sickle. [**MPC:** 4, **Power:** POW +2, **AM:** –2]

RANGED WEAPONS

Rad Grenade

When a rad grenade detonates, it releases a cloud of radiation that hovers in place until the end of the turn, at which point it dissipates. Center the blast-radius template on the point of impact. Any model caught in the cloud when the grenade explodes and any model that touches the cloud during their movement takes a Power 3 hit. Cover does not modify this attack and targets

do not get an Armor Test against it. For example, if a rad grenade detonates at the base of a wall, and models on the other side of the wall are covered by the blast radius template, those models are affected as normal by the rad grenade. [**MPC:** 5, **Range: S** 5/+1, **M** 10/—, **L** —/—, **Power:** 3, **AM:** No Test, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 2"]

Viper Pistol

The Viper is one of the most powerful handguns available. Though it is ineffective at long range, at short range it can easily punch through steel plating. The Viper is the weapon of choice among officers, which adds to its infamy. [**MPC:** 3, **Uses/Turn:** 2, **Range: S** 5/+2, **M** 10/—, **L** —/—, **Power:** 4, **AM:** –1, **Mode:** point-blank]

Kalashnikov Assault Rifle

The Kalashnikov rifle is the premier weapon for the Neo-Soviet military. Chosen as the biggest, most powerful rifle that could be afforded for the vanguard infantry, it can be used as a high-powered semi-automatic rifle and a grenade launcher.

Rifle: [**MPC:** 4, **Uses/Turn:** 2, **Range: S** 10/+1, **M** 20/—, **L** 30/–2, **Power:** 5, **AM:** 0]

Grenade Launcher: [**MPC:** 8, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 10/+1, **M** 15/—, **L** 25/–1, **Power:** 6, **AM:** –1, **Mode:** indirect, blast radius 2"]

Sub-machine Gun (SMG)

A fairly old but popular type of weapon used mostly by the rad squads as a close-assault weapon. [**MPC:** 2, **Uses/Turn:** 3, **Range: S** 5/+2, **M** 10/—, **L** 15/–2, **Power:** 3, **AM:** 0]

Assault Rifle

Any of a class of outdated weapons used only by the most expendable rad squads for their long-range capabilities. [**MPC:** 4, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **Range: S** 10/+1, **M** 20/—, **L** 30/–1, **Power:** 4, **AM:** –1]

HEAVY RANGED WEAPONS

Chem Sprayer

An unstable and dangerous weapon, the chem sprayer is a device that allows its wielder to spray streams of a horrible toxic cocktail, carried in tanks on the soldier's back. The toxic goo generates horrible mutations instantly in any living thing it touches.

Use the splash template for attacks with the chem sprayer. Large models touched by the template are automatically hit. For small and medium models caught under the template, roll D10. On a result of 5 or more, the model is hit. Models hit by this weapon that fail their Armor Test must roll D10, add their Body statistic and consult the Mutation Table.

Each time a chemgrunt is hit by an attack, roll D10. On a result of 1 or 10, the tank ruptures and explodes. The chemgrunt himself is killed, and all models within 3 inches of the unfortunate chemgrunt are hit by the toxic goo and must roll on the Mutation Table. [**MPC:** 5, **Uses/Turn:** 1, **AM:** –1, **Mode:** splash template]

MUTATION TABLE

D10 + Body	Effect
2–9	Instant Death! The model's body explodes in a chain reaction of massive mutations that leaves a puddle of chunky bubbling ooze.
10–11	The chemicals only manage to sear and burn the model. Damage: 1.
12+	No effect. Other than a temporary, slight discoloration of the skin, the model suffers no ill effects from the attack.

Heavy Machine Gun

The heavy-duty, high-powered machine gun was originally designed to be fitted to vehicles. Its bulk makes it difficult for a soldier to wield as an infantry weapon, but its superior range and power make up for any other shortcomings. [**MPC:** 6, **Range: S** 20/+2, **M** 30/+1, **L** 50/–1, **Power:** 7, **AM:** –3, **Mode:** full-auto]

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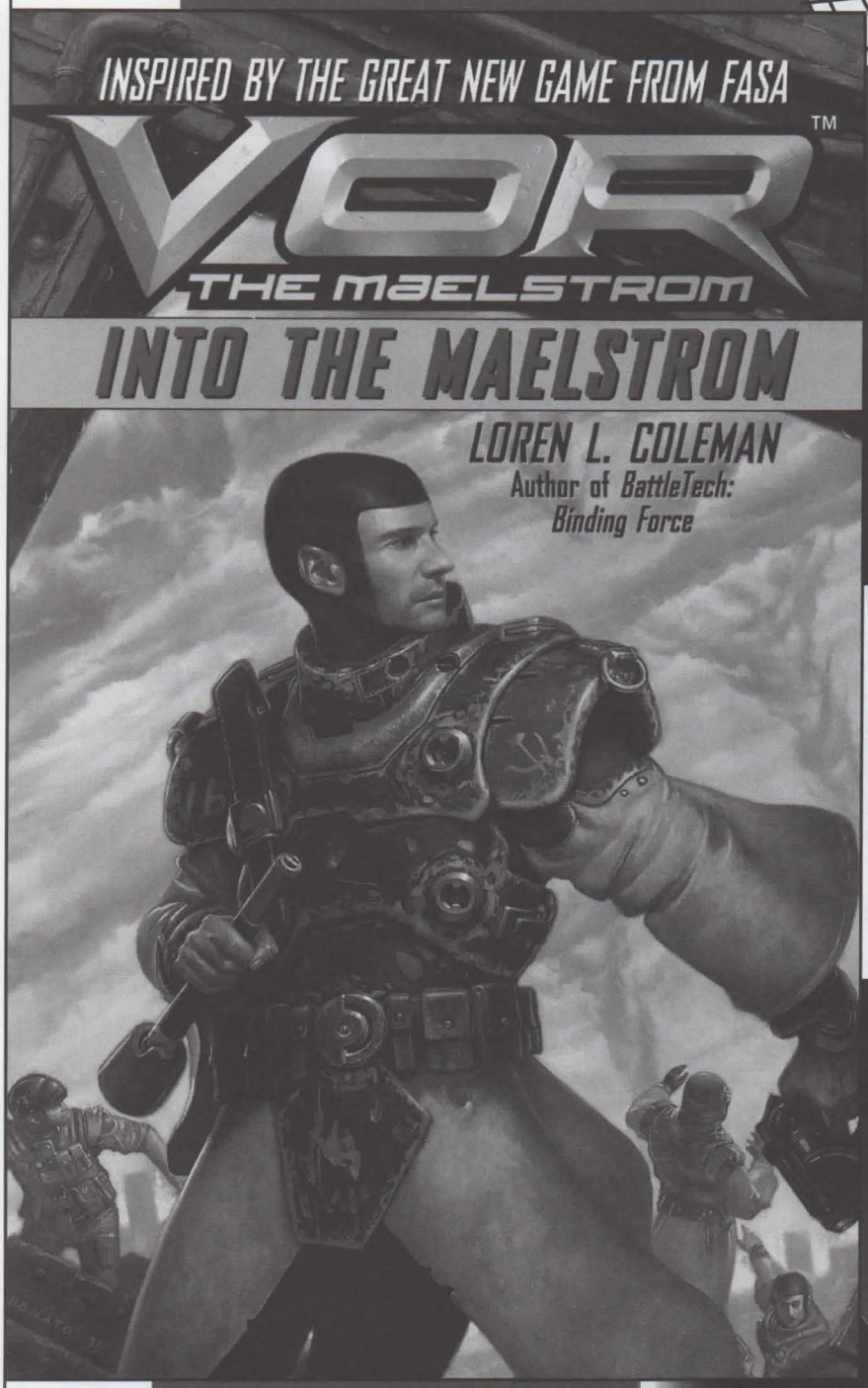

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UNIT STATISTICS

Move Points (MP): Move Points are used by models to move and attack during a turn.
Close Combat (CC): Close Combat determines a model's effectiveness in melee fighting.
Ranged Combat (RC): This determines a model's effectiveness in making ranged attacks.
Power (POW): Power determines the effectiveness of a model's melee attacks.
Body (BOD): Body reflects how resistant a model is to injury from attacks.
Brains (BRN): Brains indicates the intelligence and understanding of a model.
Guts (GUT): Guts determines how brave a model is in the face of danger.
Lifeforce (LIF): This represents how much damage it takes to kill the model.
Armor Rating (AR): The Armor Rating represents the model's physical defenses.
Point Value (PV): In general, the higher a model's PV, the more effective it is in battle.

ACTIVATION TABLE

Action	Move Points
Movement	1 inch/MP
Hold an action	All MP (see p. 76)
Use weapon/ability	See MPC in *Force Lists*, p. 120
Aim	1/2 ranged attack MP cost, round up
Unarmed melee attack	3 MP/attack (4 MP for large models)
Move out of melee	1 MP (see p. 87)
Jump	4 MP
Stand up	3 MP
Enter/exit vehicle	1 MP
Moving in Structures	
Moving between levels	1 MP per inch of distance between levels
Climbing buildings or terrain	1 MP per inch of height of obstacle
Turn Cost (vehicles only)	
Light vehicles	1 MP
Medium vehicles	2 MP
Heavy vehicles	3 MP

TARGET PRIORITY (p. 81)

When making a ranged attack, a model must shoot at any enemy that is within 12" before being able to attack more distant targets. If several enemies are within 12", a model must shoot at the nearest enemy (unless that enemy is behind cover).

DAMAGE (p. 87)

Armor Test: Roll D10. If the result is less than or equal to the target's **AR** minus the attacker's **AM**, the attack has no effect.

Damage Test: Subtract the target model's Body from the attack's Power. Add 5. This is the target number for the Damage Test. Roll D10. If the result is less than or equal to the target number, the attack has successfully damaged the model.

CRITICAL HITS AND MISSES

A result of 1 on an attack to-hit roll is a critical hit. This means the attack automatically hits, and the target of the attack cannot make an Armor Test to avoid the damage.

A result of 10 on an attack to-hit roll is a critical miss. The attack automatically misses, and the attacking model loses any remaining MP for that turn.

MORALE (p. 88)

If a squad is reduced to half its original size, or if an individual model is reduced to half its original Lifeforce, it must make a Morale Test or panic.. In general, you need to roll a D10 and get a result equal to or less than the units Guts value.

THE GAME TURN (p. 75)

1. Roll D10 for initiative. High roller wins and starts first.
2. Starting player can choose any player and/or unit to be activated to begin the turn. Play then proceeds clockwise around the table.
3. Players take turns activating their units until all units have gone.

CLOSE COMBAT

1. Subtract the weapon/ability's MP Cost.
2. Choose the target for the attack.
3. Compare Close Combat statistics.
4. Apply modifiers to the attack.
5. Roll D10 to hit.
6. Determine damage.

CLOSE COMBAT MODIFIERS TABLE

Condition	Modifier*
Attacker has higher Close Combat	+1
Target has higher Close Combat	–1
Attacker charging	+1
Receiving a charge (p. 86)	+1
Target prone	+2
Target is paralyzed with panic	+2

* This number modifies the Close Combat statistic of the attacker for the current attack only.

RANGED COMBAT

1. Subtract the weapon/ability's MP Cost.
2. Choose a target for the attack.
3. Determine the range to the target.
4. Apply modifiers to the attack.
5. Roll D10 to hit.
6. Determine damage.

RANGED COMBAT MODIFIERS TABLE

Condition	Modifier*
Range (short, medium, long)	per weapon/ability (see *Force Lists*)
Aimed shot	+1
Soft cover	–1
Hard cover (+1 AR modifier to target)	–2
Target is a large model	+1
Firing into melee from outside	–1 per combatant
Firing within a melee	–1
Attacker using held action	–1
Indirect attack	–1
Full-auto attack	–1
Target is paralyzed with panic	+2
Targeting the ground (blast attacks only)	–1

* This number modifies the Ranged Combat statistic of the attacker for the current attack only.